

PROVINCETOWN

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VOLUME 15
ANNUAL ISSUE 2000/01

I've always
thought a poet
should think
big, not small.

A mass audience
is created of an
incredibly exquisite
network of many
little communities.

I write for the little
community where
I start, and I have
no idea where that
message may travel.

—Eileen Myles



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Varujan Boghosian, *Cezanne's Orchard*, 1999
mixed media

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Paul Resika, *Sleeping Gypsy*, 1980-82, 61 x 77", oil on canvas

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Nancy Craig, *Renaissance Dream Drawing:
Dream on the White Horse*, 60 x 38", oil on canvas

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Hans Hofmann, *Planes*, 1941, 17 x 14"
crayon and ink on paper

JULY 21 - AUGUST 7
HANS HOFMANN
The Summer Studio: *Provincetown Drawings*
BRENDA HOROWITZ
Color Contrasts: *Cape View Paintings*



Brenda Horowitz, *Nauset Magenta*, 2000, 36 x 40"
oil on canvas

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AUGUST 11 - AUGUST 21

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New Paintings



Robert Henry, *Lunatics*, 2000, 40 x 30"
oil on canvas



Selina Trieff, *Moving*, 2000, 72 x 60"
oil on canvas

AUGUST 25 - SEPTEMBER 4

NANCY WHORF

Personal Provincetown:

Land and Sea

GILBERT FRANKLIN

Dancers & Devas:

Recent Bronze Sculpture

CARMEN CICERO

Expressionist Watercolors



Nancy Whorf, *The Long Way Home*, 2000, 48 x 72", oil on panel



Anne MacAdam, *Mustard Seed*, 1998, 16 x 25", Oil on canvas

SEPTEMBER 8 - SEPTEMBER 24

ANNE MACADAM

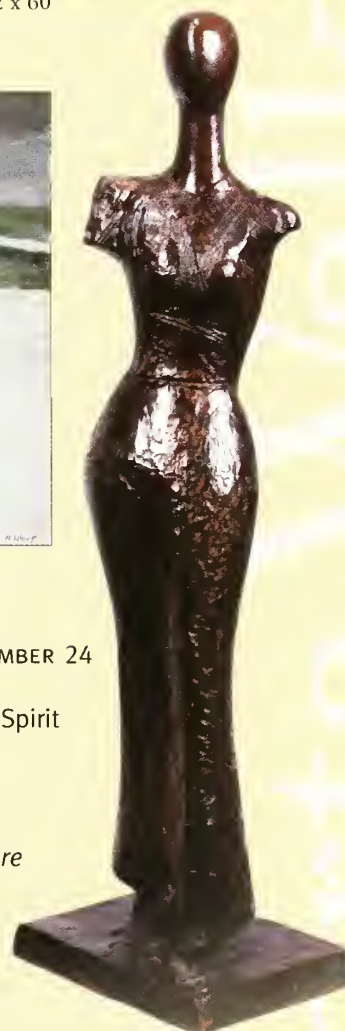
The Land: Light and Spirit

New Paintings

MARTHA DUNIGAN

Return of the Native:

Mixed Media Sculpture



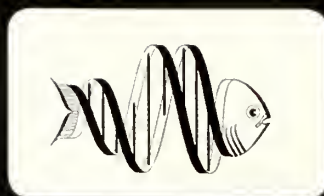
Gilbert Franklin
Night Figure
Height 15"
Bronze

Berta Walker Gallery **EXHIBITIONS 2000**

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IMAGE: JOEL MEYEROWITZ



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DANIEL RANALLI AND TABITHA VEVERS

SEPTEMBER 1 TO OCTOBER 1

FRANCIE RANDOLPH, JANICE REDMAN
BOB BAILEY AND HIROYUKI HAMADA

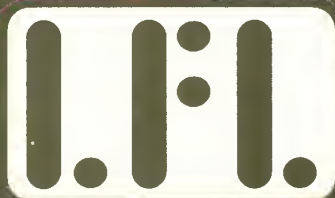
11-6 DAILY AND BY APPOINTMENT

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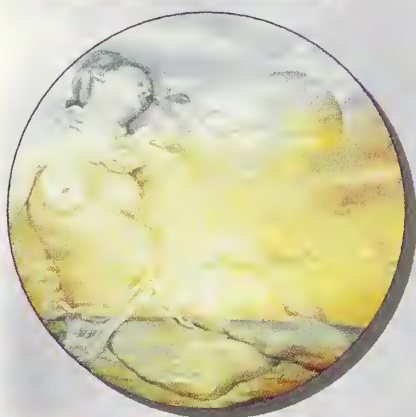
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August 11 Colette Hébert

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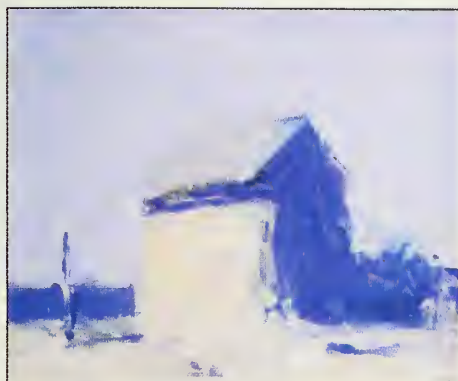
George Yater

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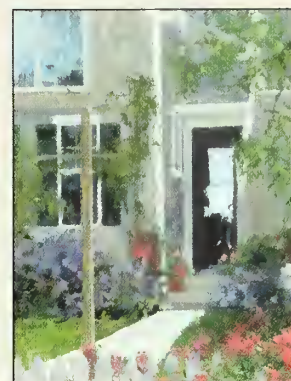
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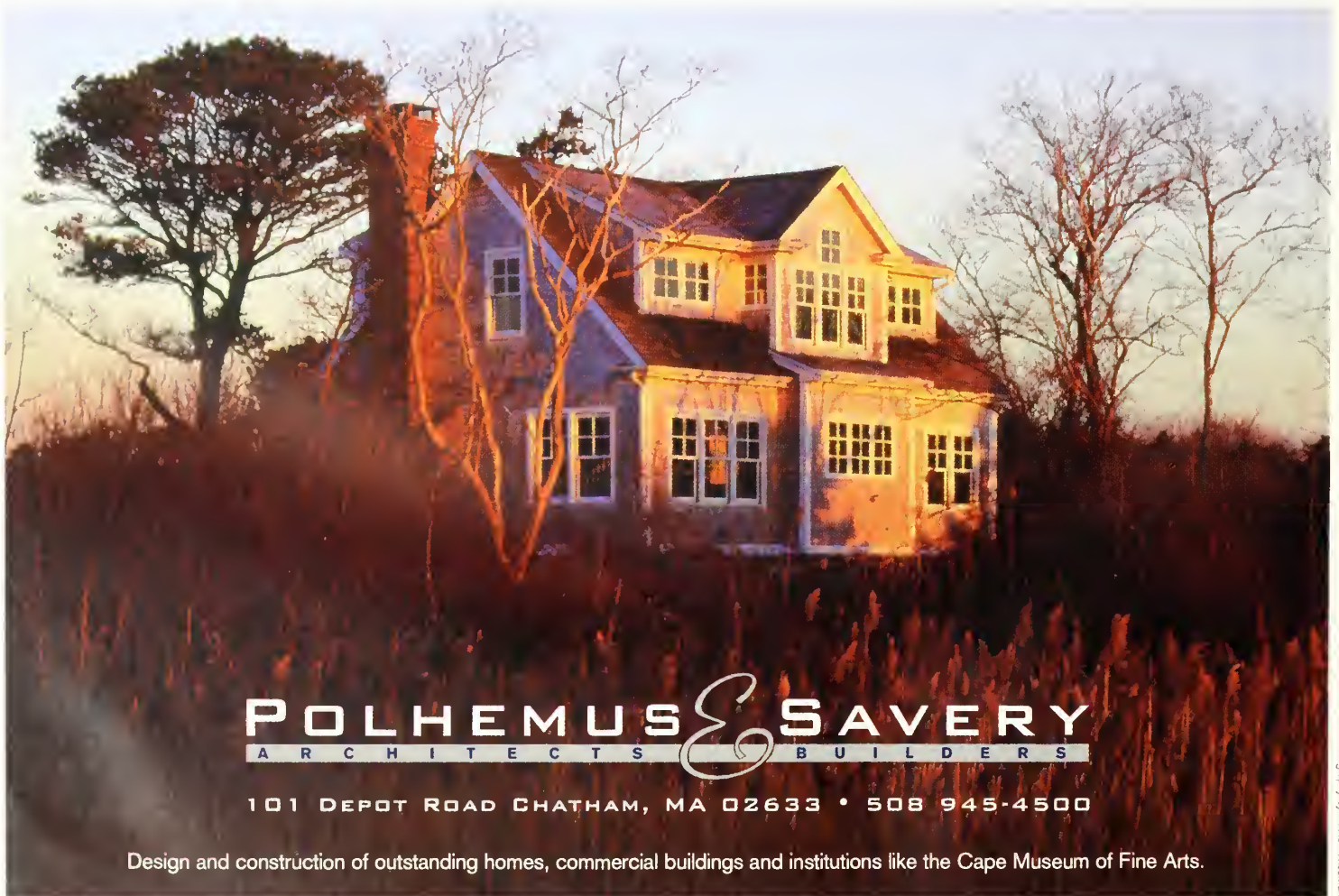
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Eileen Myles, May 2000
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Published annually in mid-summer since 1985, *Provincetown Arts* focuses broadly on artists, performers, and writers who inhabit or visit the tip of Cape Cod, and seeks to stimulate creative activity and enhance public awareness of the cultural life of the nation's oldest continuous art colony. Drawing upon a century-long tradition rich in art, theater, and writing, *Provincetown Arts* publishes essays, fiction, interviews, journals, performance pieces, poetry, profiles, reporting, reviews, and visual features, with a view toward demonstrating that a community of artists, functioning outside the urban centers, is a utopian dream with an ongoing vitality.

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Provincetown Arts Press held its first-ever NYC benefit last fall at the quintessential SoHo loft of artist Catherine Mosley. The party, which drew hundreds of Provincetown friends, celebrated the release of three new Poets Series trade editions—books by Keith Althaus, Anne-Marie Levine, and Martha Rhodes that had gone out of print. Levine and Rhodes gave readings, jazz singer Cat Henry performed with her trio, and Necee Regis provided delectable comestibles. PAP founder Christopher Busa, speaking from an elevated balcony, surveyed the crowd below and recalled that many years ago he had carried the tiles beneath everyone's feet up the building's five flights of stairs. He reported that a literary journal's average lifespan is seven years and likened the haul to that of keeping *Provincetown Arts* alive and kicking for twice that.



GREG WARNKE, PEPSI
1999-2000

Albert Merola Gallery announces the representation of Greg Warnke, a photographer from Vermont, who will join long-time gallery artists Donna Flax, Helen Miranda Wilson, Duane Slick, James Balla, and Richard Baker with solo shows this season. On view throughout the summer will be works by gallery artists, including Michael Mazur, whose MFA retrospective (reviewed in this issue) ran concurrently with shows in New York, Boston, and Verona, Italy, and John Waters, whose new film is punningly titled, *Cecil B. Demented*. More news: works by Lester Johnson and Peter Busa were recently acquired by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, respectively.

Bangs Street Gallery, banging on the door of the big time, was characterized by Art Basel as a "risk-taking gallery showing art previously ignored." The gallery's candidate for 2001 is John Calhoun. In August, "Heads" features new portraits by David Armstrong, Susanna Coffey, Jack Pierson, and Caroline Thomson.

Before sitting down to a seder in the Brooklyn studio of painter Jonathan Blum, a guest pulled out a copy of the April 20th issue of the *Banner* (now *The Banner and The Advocate*), waving its headline—"Banner buys Advocate in Historic Merger"—in front of former and summer Provincetown residents. Eyes popped and gasps sounded like thunder, as displaced townies reckoned with the news. Inside the pages, *Advocate* publisher and editor Duane Steele bade a bittersweet farewell, declaring to his readers, "I want you to know that I did it all for you ... despite the pain you often inflicted on me, and I on you. I loved you dearly. I always will." It was clear that Steele was tired and ready to move on. Passover's story is oft applied to modern-day enslavements and emancipations, and though Steele's twenty-five years at the *Advocate* weren't quite forty years wandering in the desert, his sudden freedom suggested some comparison.

The *Banner* staff won five awards at this year's New England Press Association gathering. Most notable in these pages is Features Editor Sue Harrison taking first place in Arts and Entertainment reporting. We would like to congratulate Sue and to thank her for providing consistently astute and generous writing on local arts of all sorts.

Berta Walker Gallery has become the official New England representative of the Hans Hofmann Estate. Her season will feature the artist's dear and lively "Provincetown Drawings," as well as shows by Robert Henry, Selina Tieff, Nancy Whorf, and others. An exhibition of paintings by Nancy Craig promises to be a revelation. Craig's paintings teem with Greek mythological figures, chubby cherubs, writhing nudes, and rearing horses, recalling Renaissance



NANCY CRAIG, RAPE
OF THE DAUGHTERS
OF RUBENS #1

masterpieces. A student of Edwin Dickinson and Hofmann, Craig has lived in Truro for thirty years, yet this will be her first local show. The scale of her paintings—so colossal that Walker reconfigured her space specifically to oblige—has been daunting in the past. Walker said she was reminded of Craig's chimerical figures during winter trips to Turkey, Greece, and Egypt. She was struck by the "magical antiquity" of Istanbul, where "all the mosques sing to each other." In Egypt, she visited the temple of Hathor, goddess of fertility, love, art, dance, and music, and sat at the paws of the Sphinx. Of course a great collector couldn't come home empty-handed—Walker returned with Turkish carpets, a tiny black stone carving found at the Pyramids, and an appreciative reflection: "The soil and light of Egypt are unique in the world—just like here. It felt like home."

PHOTO: TRELLA LAUGHLIN



Laurel Louise Daigle Wise Brooke arrived in Provincetown in 1973 on a rebuilt lobster boat and died here in the company of many loving friends on February 6, 2000, in the early morning hours the Tibetan New Year. A well-known percussionist, Brooke played over the years with Provincetown

Women Drummers, Wild Women of All Sexes, and Weaving the Matrix. Fellow musician John Thomas recalled Brooke's successful challenge of Provincetown's unconstitutional prohibition of street performance in 1994, and advised, "When you enjoy a performer on our streets, thank Laurel." He also reflected, "Each life has a main theme. Laurel's was community. A few days before her mastectomy in 1988, Laurel stood before hundreds of us at the Celebration of Life Concert and proclaimed, 'I am so full of your love and your support that I basically have no pain. I feel alive and well and strong and I attribute it to you ... this is a town of love. Celebrate your life every day!'"

Cameo Appearances. a gallery and antiques shop once housed in the East Village, has moved to lower Chelsea (otherwise known as the Meatpacking District). The new gallery space, run by Lynne Burns and Herb Atkins, will feature Provincetown artists Stephen Aiken, Susan Baker, Arthur Cohen, William Eval, Lisbeth Firmin, Robert Henry, Noma Holt, Jackson Lambert, Tom O'Connell, Jim Rann, Selina Tieff, and Brian Wendler. A grand gala in September will open the first exhibition, "Provincetown Comes to NYC."



HERMAN MARIL, BIG
CATCH, 1972

The **Cape Museum of Fine Arts** proudly presents "Many Seasons," an exhibition of Herman Maril's paintings of the sporting life—baseball, football, and lacrosse games, bowling, even kite-flying, rendered in wide washes of quiet color. For tastes more brazen, don't miss the follow-up "Surrealism in America," a nationally touring exhibition of works from the estimable collection of Penny and Elton Yasuna. The CMFA's "Tuesdays with the Muse Series" is a bimonthly foray into thought-provoking terrain, with topics ranging from "Local Art Agendas" to "Meditations on the Art of Rowing" to "Hmmm ... You Mean *that's* Art?" This last was a spring panel discussion and slide show led by critic and curator Ann Wilson Lloyd and featuring relatively radical artists Jay Critchley and Portia Munson. A good-sized crowd was warmly receptive, excepting however

two elderly ladies who punctuated each switch of the slides with grumbles of "Yuck," "Oh dear," and "This is insane!"

Longing for a little spirituality to balance the debauchery of Provincetown night life? Visit the newly constructed **Church of the Transfiguration** in Orleans. Designed by Boston architect William Rawn, the Church, inspired by 1st-century architectural style, features elaborate stone relief, stained glass, and mosaic, along with a "conch-shaped apse which encircles the altar." The most impressive external detail may be its fifteen-foot cast-bronze doors, fabricated by New York and Provincetown sculptor Romolo Del Deo. The newsletter of the ecumenical Community of Jesus, which will worship inside these doors, describes their imagery as portraying "the still innocent Adam and Eve, fresh from the moment of creation, beside the flourishing Tree of Life," and assures that despite weighing in at 4,000 pounds, the doors "have been carefully engineered to open easily." Thank God.



BARRY CLIFFORD
ABOVE SEA-LEVEL
PHOTO: MARGOT
NICOL-HATHAWAY

Ken Kinkor, *Whydah* Museum Director, sent the following update: "Last February, undersea explorer **Barry Clifford** led a team of archaeologists and divers over 13,000 miles to the tiny isle of Ste. Marie off the north-east coast of Madagascar. Their goal: Exploring the 301-year-old wreck of *The Adventure Galley*, flagship of the famed pirate Captain Kidd.

With a combination of old-fashioned historical detective work and new-fangled satellite imagery, the team found the wreck on the first day of diving. Clifford and crew are preparing for another expedition to take further archeological measurements and recover key diagnostic artifacts for eventual reconstruction. If things go well, there's a chance that Expedition *Whydah* Sea Lab and Learning Center on Macmillan Wharf will be displaying artifacts from *The Adventure Galley*."

The Monday night **Coffeehouse at the Mews** got an extra dose of caffeine when poet and artist Melanie Braverman hosted for the month of January. Braverman amused with her wry combination of spokesmodel elegance and Catskills comedienne. Performers included a be-wigged mystery guest who played "City," a famous performance artist who spent a \$100,000 grant on giving Fabergé eggs to the poor. Former members of the band Space Pussy reunited, a woman passed out mermaid gingerbread cookies made in an Easy-Bake Oven, Miss Pat screened a psychedelic clip from a video on drag kings, and Braverman herself read a boundlessly rousing poem that began, "Let's talk about sex," and continued, "you see/that man walking just-ahead of you, the woman/whose arms are swinging at, you/swear, the same/cadence as your own, my god, she/has an amazing ass, it's round or/small, whatever/kind of ass you like that's/it, moving in front/of you like a beacon, like/an offering." Sometimes January got pretty hot.

Jay Critchley brought a satirical take on masculinity and gender roles to Harvard this year as their 1999-2000 Marshall Cogan Visiting Artist. A semester of improvisations with university students culminated in an extravaganza called "The Lymptick Diatribes: It's Hard to Be a Man." On a dark Cambridge basement stage, the cast assumed their roles as the singing and dancing, flaccidity-loving residents of Lymptville. The plot twisted as Lord Peter Everhard III tried in vain to lure Lymptvillians to his prototype community, the Island Paradise of Hardonia. The racing of pulses was palpable as all ten cast members emanated a symphonic collective orgasm. On a more earnest note, Critchley also spoke on a panel entitled "Art for AIDS Sake: Is the Disease Still a Valid Metaphor?" presented by the Harvard University Arts Committee on AIDS on World AIDS Day.

The **C-Scape Mapping Project** continues as founder Traven Pelletier moves to Ann Arbor, Michigan. Pelletier ushered dozens of artists to the C-Scape dune shack over the last two winters, and the results will be shown for a second year at the Schoolhouse Gallery. Recent highlights of the project include a Global Positioning Satellite System (GPS) workshop with mapping project co-founder Mark Adams, a radio piece for WOMR's Environmental Roundtable by artist Jen Bradley, and a Landscape Arts and Mapping Project with the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School and local artist Mary Alice Johnston. A book documenting the project's last three years in the dunes is under construction. Pelletier expressed both sadness and joy in setting off from his native Cape, but assures that he will stay involved with both the C-Scape Mapping Project and the local arts community. We wish him well.

This winter one couldn't miss the flaxen-haired **Mary Jane Dean** wheeling her fifty-four-liter glass bottle (originally intended for Italian wine) along Commercial Street. Dean, a Fine Arts Work Center visual fellow, captained the "Drift Bottle Project," which celebrated Provincetown's "aspirations, thoughts, dreams, and insights" in the form of messages written by townspeople, collected in black boxes installed at various public sites, then stuffed in the bottle, and ultimately set off to sea. In addition to the bottle, Dean listed her materials thusly: "60 lbs. lead, wax, cork, sisal, copper, nautical charts, blueprints ... 500 messages, one town, one boat, one ocean." After a conclusion ceremony, the Drift Bottle was launched from the *Endeavor*, a Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute research vessel. Last seen floating in the Atlantic Gulf Stream in a north-easterly direction, its discovery had yet to transpire at press time.

DNA Gallery owner Nick Lawrence flew south this spring, opening a new venue in New York City along with two partners. LFL Gallery, in the heart of Chelsea, had a smashing opening night; director Zach Feuer reported over 200 visitors, including several P'towners. The gallery's first show included a neon sign by Matt Dilling, spelling out the words, "I miss you." Not to worry, Provincetown won't have to miss DNA. This season, gallery veterans including Anna Poor, Joel Meyerowitz, Tabitha Ververs, Daniel Ranalli, Peter Hutchinson, Gregory Amenoff, Francie Randolph, and Bob Bailey will be joined by Janice Redman, whose sculptures, whether wrapped or not, are absolute gifts.

In a fitting tribute, **Bill Evaul** recently exhibited white-line portraits of the Provincetown Printers at the Charles Demuth Foundation in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Closer to home, he showed recent work at the Davis Gallery in June. In December, the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University will exhibit six-foot prints acquired for the opening of the David and Ruth Robinson-Eisenberg Gallery. Evaul's latest commission is a CD cover for jazz singer Lisa Yves, due out this fall.



MICHAEL HATTERSLEY

This year's **Fall Arts Festival**, to be held from September 22nd to October 1st, is coordinated by artist and art writer Rana Lindstrom. Subtitled "Days & Nights," the festival will feature round-the-clock exhibitions, readings, open studios, auctions, seminars, theater, and parties. Last year's coordinator, Michael Hattersley, expressed the following encouraging thoughts: "I think that, due to the efforts of many people, Provincetown may be on the verge of another cultural renaissance. Look at last year alone: we've had a Film Festival, a Poetry Festival, a Centennial Fall Arts Festival, and a series of Playwrights Festivals. All were of high artistic quality and drew great audiences. It's our cultural heritage and future that will prevent Provincetown from becoming merely a beautiful beach with a line of T-shirt shops."



1999-2000 FAWC FELLOWS AND FRIENDS AT THE ANNUAL DUNESHACK LUNCH

Common Room with special readings by literary luminaries and a concurrent exhibition of works by Elise Asher, the poet's wife. This winter FAWC announced a \$2 million capital campaign. Acknowledging that its "history has been filled with tough times," Board President Hatty Walker Fitts looked forward to a future as rich in funding as FAWC is in its legacy.

With sadness we note the passing of **Gregory Gillespie**, a celebrated painter whose retrospective was traveling the country at the time of his death. While he lived in Belchertown, MA, Gillespie was a frequent visitor to Provincetown, and taught at the Fine Arts Work Center's Summer Program. FAWC will hold a memorial tribute in August.

This spring, New York got a taste of Provincetown's favorite views in the form of **Pat de Groot's** pristine paintings of the harborview out her Commercial Street window. De Groot's first New York solo show took place at the Pat Hearn Gallery, and her small-scale gems, depicting sea, horizon, and sky in various states of weathery grace, held their own on the enormous walls of Chelsea. Many locals attended the opening, including Paul Bowen, who said the work "really sparkled," and added, "It was great to see that, at last, Pat is getting the recognition she deserves." Proof is in the glowing review of a *New York Times* critic, who wrote, "one feels the sensual reality of both the world and the paint the way one does with Monet or Pissaro."

This winter, a sign-in form made its way around town bearing the following message: "**GONE**—Are you aware of anyone who has left or is leaving Provincetown due to lack of available, affordable housing? We are collecting names for a commemorative memorial project." Long lists of names impressed, or perhaps depressed. No word yet on how friends lost to more affordable locales will be commemorated.



BOB KENNEDY, STILL LIFE NO. 2

Last summer, **Bob Kennedy** of Kennedy Galleries made a quick pencil sketch that quickly evolved into an oil painting, his first still life in forty years. The composition is a happy accident resulting from everyday domestic clutter, including *Provincetown Arts* 1999, which sits on the table at night.



RICHARD DE QUATTRO, THE LOVERS, C. 1995

At least two new galleries join the scene this summer. **Larson Gallery** features landscapes by Vermont painter Frank Larson and by his son, Alan, as well as the paintings and fiber-works of Richard De Quattro. De Quattro renders details of Provincetown's shoreline architecture with exuberant color and pattern, and bestows love on humble objects and settings in a way that might be called Matissean. His sculpture in the form of clothing—tunics and hats woven from multi-color yarns and strips of fabric—read as chainmail armor for an all-carnival world. **aHead: contemporary Art house** is the dream made real for co-owners Jerry Devine and Ho Blair. The little gallery's red walls are hung salon-style with affordable works ranging from outsider art, to fused glass, to paintings in everything from brushy

The **Fine Arts Work Center's** Summer Program is in full swing, with courses in writing and art by the likes of Michael Cunningham, Mark Doty, Selina Trieff, and Paul Bowen. On August 26th, as part of Stanley Kunitz's 95th birthday bash, FAWC will rededicate the newly refurbished Stanley Kunitz

Ab Ex-style to hard-edge minimalism. Blair acknowledges that he and his partner are "not landscape kind of people," which perhaps explains their having culled artists not from Provincetown, but from New York, Ohio, San Francisco, England, Italy, and France. Vive la difference!

In memoriam, with love from Eileen Myles and Karin Cook: "**Kristyna (aka Chicken) Morton-Meraz** was a poet and writer, a Gemini, a great old soul. She was born in Southern California and migrated to San Francisco as a teen. She began to find her poetic self in the midst of the Sister Spit tribe of writers and performers in the Mission. Last September she rocked and delighted a crowd at the Schoolhouse when she read from her scorching 'Letters to Momma,' followed by an awesome delivery of Dr. Seuss's *Fox and Socks*. The evening was a luminous release, totally in keeping with the being of this warm, sexy, tough, and brilliant girl. Kristyna came to P'town for the first time in the summer of '98. She walked into Coconuts, bought a pair of sunglasses from Lisa Bonenfant and fell in love. Kristyna had come home. She died of leukemia on June 2nd at the age of twenty-eight. She was in the company of her mother and father, her lover Lisa, and her beloved friends. That afternoon there was a fierce storm in Provincetown. 'Have no doubt,' Lisa said, 'that storm was my baby showing off ... she's like that.'" A collection of Kristyna's work is being gathered for publication in early fall. Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to: The Community Compact/Kristyna Fund, PO Box 819, Provincetown, MA 02657.

"Are they filming *The Perfect Storm*?" asked one of many gawkers lingering outside the Old Colony to watch the filming of *Off Season*. Co-written by Provincetown High School graduate Casey Clark and Blythe Frank, the short takes place in a fictional fishing community called Shank Painter Point. The confusion was understandable. The venue did resemble the Gloucester bar where much of the bestselling novel and film are set. And further doubletakes ensued as scruffy actors mingled with real-life fishermen, the difference perceptible only to those able to distinguish between weather-worn skin and piles of pancake make-up.



DICK MILLER, BLAIR RESIKA, AND CARMEN CICERO

Payomet Performing Arts in Truro presents a bountiful line-up this season, beginning with a four-week run of *Full Gallop*, a one-person play about the life of "sultana of style" Diana Vreeland, starring Geraldine Librandi. Other highlights include: singer Blair Resika, pianist Dick Miller, and alto sax player Carmen Cicero tripping up for a "Triple Centennial" of music by Victor Young, Kurt Weill, and Arthur Schwartz; and clarinetist Paul Nossiter leading a Centennial Salute to Louis Armstrong. On a divergent path, Stephen Kinzer, *New York Times* Istanbul Bureau Chief, speaks on "Dictators I Have Known: 20 Years Among Despots, Tyrants, and War Criminals on Three Continents."

The **Provincetown Art Association and Museum's** big winter event was an exhibition from the permanent collection at the National Arts Club in New York. Works selected by museum director Robyn Watson and artist and art historian Tony Ververs represented seventy artists from Charles Hawthorne to M.P. Landis. A panel discussion called "Provincetown Connections" was presented in conjunction with the exhibition and featured artists Will Barnet, Robert Henry, Joyce Johnson, Lillian Orlowsky, Jim Peters, and Jack Pierson, and gallerist Pat Hearn. Highlights of the summer season are too many to list, but don't miss the three-part exhibition, "The Art Colony's First Century," a series of panel discussions called "Forum 2000," and the "Masquerade Ball des Artistes," a Provincetown tradition dating back to 1915, to be revived at Town Hall in July.

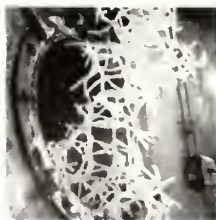
Just in time for spring flowers, the **Provincetown Library** replaced its fallen linden tree with a new American elm on the front brick "lawn." An Arbor Day dedication ceremony featured Selectman David Atkinson speaking on "The Story of the 'Three Town Tree' and the American Liberty Elm." For those who still miss the old tree, the Supporters of the Provincetown Public Library offer pieces of its stump, sanded, oiled, and branded with a linden leaf, for \$10 each.

Field Correspondant Oona Patrick gave the following take on the second annual **Provincetown Poetry Festival**, organized by Roger Chauvette and Dennis Rhodes: "On an otherwise quiet weekend in the middle of April, an enthusiastic group gathered for a week's worth of events squeezed in just under four days. Accomplished poets such as Frank Gaspar, Dean Kostos, and Alfred Corn mixed with poets of all levels. Judging from the number of readings that began with, 'I'm not a poet, but ...,' many seemed to have found a comfortable place to experiment. Common subjects were the Cape Cod landscape, gay themes, and the Portuguese-American experience. The overall theme was 'Hometowns,' which Gaspar anchored with a keynote speech. In it, a picture emerged of locals' collective 'maps' moving from the houses to the cemeteries, as he described a family site: 'One of the flat stones by the chapel—you know the ones. Kathe Izzo's panel, 'Provincetown as a Hometown: The Future of an Inner Life,' centered on the town's collective memory, which is, of course, a source for its poetry. A long, rambunctious poetry slam at the Crown & Anchor closed the festival. The Poetry Festival fits into a trend of new events, such as the Portuguese Festival, that are creating temporary spaces for those who don't fit, or don't want to fit, into existing institutions. In true Provincetown style, this festival gathered a wonderfully screwy collection of disparate people who would seem to have little in common except for a love of poetry, and of Provincetown."

Among the speakers on Izzo's panel was **Peter Manso**, who is currently writing a book on the social history of Provincetown, forthcoming from Simon & Schuster in 2001. Manso recalled the Provincetown of his youth, where he summured with his father, painter Leo Manso, as "a place of freedom, a place to roam." He spoke of clamming, boatbuilding, sandalmaking, and sailing. "I was part of the group that founded the West End Sailing Club. There ... Provincetown gave me a mentor—Flyer Santos, whose gruffness was unrelenting. I learned to sail and to read the wind, however, and later I began racing in the regular weekend races—P'town in those days had a real fleet of three beautiful 210s, as well as a bunch of Lightnings, and we had an ongoing rivalry with Wellfleet. I crewed for Adolph Gottlieb, the abstract painter, and his gruffness was not nearly as unselfish as Flyer's." He also remembered the '50s and '60s, "before Provincetown got rich," as a time when people balanced serious work with wild parties, and urged more of the latter: "What I suspect is that if Provincetown is to remain a home to artists, mavericks, and outcasts—if it is to keep its character as the Wild West of the East—by which I mean the epicenter of American individualism—then a little old-fashioned misbehavior may be in order, even unabashed muse-driven nuttiness, certainly more drinking." Cheers.

Following a brilliant 1999 season, with *Amphoragory* named one of the year's best regional productions by the *Boston Globe* and a star-studded and groundbreaking fall 1999 forum called "The Future of American Theater" (featuring Terrance McNally, August Wilson, John Guare, Christopher Durang, A.R. Gurney, Wendy Kesselman, Lanford Wilson, Paula Vogel, and Jon Robin Baitz), the **Provincetown Repertory Theater** began rethinking its own future. Hopes to build a home theater at the base of the Monument, in play since 1996, were dashed as fiscal realities set in. Artistic Director Ken Hoyt assures that the shows will go on, but the question is—where? At press time, a new prospect had arisen and all looked good. This year's highlight is sure to be a performance of shorts written by visiting playwright Craig Lucas, of *Prelude to a Kiss* fame.

This year's culminating **Provincetown Theatre Company** event is a "Fall Playwright's Festival celebrating the 101st anniversary of Provincetown as an Arts Colony." Did the PTC not get their fill of centennial festivities last year, or is this one of those "it's not the next millennium until 2001" tricks? Also on the bill, Paula Vogel's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *How I Learned to Drive*, A.R. Gurney's comedy *Sylvia*, and the Children's Theatre selection, *The Prince Who Wouldn't Talk*, by James Brock. PTC, in its 37th year, stages its summer productions at the Provincetown Inn in the far West End.



DETAIL OF YELLOW THINGS

On a hot Manhattan night in May, upwards of 1,500 revelers danced under fireworks, a crescent moon, and Provincetown artist **Sal Randolph's** "Yellow Things," 5,000 woven yellow pipe-cleaners installed in several cabins of the *Frying Pan*, an old barge on the Hudson River. The installation was meant to "evoke the underwater imagery of murkily lit coral reefs from Jacques Cousteau's 1970s adventures," and it did, forming an exotic backdrop to "Take Back the Decks." The festival of "women in underground music" featured wizard DJ/turntablists spinning hip-hop, house, and "basement bhangra" (asian underground spun by DJ Rekha). We're waiting for Mishpucha, the collective of "music activists" who made the night happen, to bring us "DJ's in the Dunes!"



RAY FISHER'S PORTRAIT OF KAREN BLACK, C. 1966, FROM "MOVIE STARS"

shots, offers just a taste of the riches presented by in-house vintage photography curator Larry Collins. Gallery artists including Donald Beal, Jen Bradley, David Carrino, Barbara Cohen, Amy Kandall, and Paul Lee, will also have shows. Beginning in late June, Narrowland Stage presents "The Summer Salons," a series of performances curated and produced by David Davis and featuring the Mark Meehan Trio, James Lecesne, Ricky Ian Gordon, and Brenda Currin. This year's Artist In Residence, poet and author Nick Flynn, curates the Schoolhouse Reading Series and will lead a panel discussion on "Obsession."

The **Shadow Writing Project** is breaking bright and subversive new ground with a spoken-word CD featuring Shadow members and high school teachers. Shadow founder Kathe Izzo reports, "We have been experimenting this year, reading to drummer Sylvie Richard, and diving deeper into the universal unconscious, working overtime." Izzo had a breakthrough year, showing in San Francisco, Boston, and here, at the Schoolhouse, where she presented "Spiral of Home," a collaborative installation by thirty three girls and women born in Provincetown. This fall she will apprentice with a corset maker in Venice Beach as part of a residency at the 18th Street Studios in Santa Monica. Corsets will populate her new installations. Her poetry appeared in the recently released *Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*, published by Thunders Mouth Press.



JAY CRITCHLEY AT 17TH ANNUAL RE-ROOTERS DAY, JANUARY 7, 2000 PHOTO WALT GREELEY

Recipients had only to choose a major to receive a handsome diploma and hand-made metal medallion. After Pearlene sang the National Anthem, degrees were awarded

in disciplines ranging from "Sheetrocking," to "Hempology" to "Chartreuse." Other summer performances will include the return of "Septic Opera: Heaven and Hell." Septic Space founder Jay Critchley explains his unorthodox underground venue this way: "O'Neill and the Provincetown Players had abandoned wharves to work with in the early 1900s; we have abandoned septic tanks for the early 2000s. Let's keep the tradition alive!" The space is also available for rituals, art installations, and commitment ceremonies.



DIANNA MATHERLEY, NOTHING TO HIDE, 1999

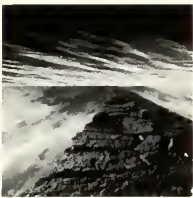
Tristan Gallery opened the high season with "Small Town Life," aka, "The Townie Show." Among those reflecting on the mostly heartwarming matter—Midge Battelle, Paul Bowen, Carole Carlson, Michael Carroll, John Dowd, Chet Jones, Lee Musselman, Morgan Norwood, Elizabeth Pearl, and Sky Power. Gallery artists Dianna Matherley, Marc Civitarese, Phil Spinks, and Pauline Lim will show throughout the summer. October brings a show of images from the "Obsessed with Breasts Campaign," an invitational exhibition called "From the Heart," and a reprisal of last year's "21/31 Dianna," a photographic essay by Jamie DeVener documenting one woman's journey through breast cancer treatment and recovery. The woman is Matherley, who calls her own work "an expression of passion and love" as she celebrates her fifth anniversary of remission following two battles with breast cancer.

Over fifty summer workshops at the **Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill** will include new classes in video, illustration, and kiln-fired glass. Exhibitions will include an invitational called "Self-Examination," curated by Tom McCanna and Mary Stackhouse. Actor Kevin McCarthy will present scenes from his one-man show, *Give 'Em Hell Harry*, and readings from his book, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. This year's Distinguished Artists and Writers Chair, Sebastian Junger, will give a lecture and workshop in August.

Provincetown playwright **Sinan Ünel's** *Pera Palas* opened to rave reviews at London's Gate Theatre in May. The play's title refers to the Pera Palas Hotel in Istanbul, where much of the action takes place in a single room. While limiting space, Ünel blows time wide open—his characters exist simultaneously just after WW I, in the 1950s, and in 1994. *The Sunday Times of London* described how the Turkish-American playwright knows "exactly where the flash points are when cultures clash," and understands "the springs of motivation, the aggression and insecurity that turn emigration, internal or external, from personal liberation into a political act." Upon returning home, Ünel reflected on the feat of rehearsing a virtual epic over just three weeks, and added, "It was especially moving for me to see some of my dearest friends in the audience on opening night: Jackie and Louise Kelley, Scott Penn, Mary Jo Avellar, Rose Steele from Provincetown, Lynda Sturmer, Joan Fox, and Barbara Wise from Truro, and several friends from New York City. It was quite a night for me and a wonderful celebration."

Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater opens its 2000 season with Tony Award-winner Julie Harris in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, a dark comedy about a lonely woman that promises a "terrifying dénouement." Not to be missed: *Ruby Tuesday*, written and directed by WHAT founder Gip Hoppe. The play is set in the year 2025, in a technologically obsessed "wired nation" in which support for the arts has devolved to such an extent that the NEA gives only one grant to one artist. Regarding WHAT's recent transition to full-Equity status and the purchase of a Wellfleet house for its actors, Co-Artistic Director Jeff Zinn affirmed, "We have a nice stability growing."

Wohlfarth Galleries is especially pleased to present its July exhibition of fine Iris prints by John Paul Caponigro. The show is called "Elemental Waterways" and the images show what happens when an artist lets very loose with photographs and a computer. In *Causeway*, the sea



becomes the sky and the sky the sea, while a stone pathway reaches toward a horizon you'd swear is upside down, until you realize there's no such thing as an upside down horizon. Or is there?

In April, Provincetown Arts poetry editor **Rebecca Wolff's** first play had a staged reading at the Medicine Show Theater in New York. *Urbana*, billed as "A Cocktail Farce of Artistic Dynasty," is set in a Cape summer cottage "decorated with found items of bygone bohemia—chipped pottery, beach glass, beat-up antiqueish furniture." Artists and writers in their thirties, gathered here for the first cocktail party of the season, chat in that seemingly friendly, subtly biting, lock-jawed way that only long-time friends from families with legacies do. Wolff's characters, however paradoxically drawn, are disarmingly familiar. They possess a collective ennui borne of the realization that their famed forbears had so much to believe in, "that whole Communist intellectual thing," as one character puts it. Another laments that if they were to start a magazine to succeed the *Partisan Review*, "We'd have to call it the *Impartial Review*." A Dr. Seussian detail—artists wear gold stars on their foreheads as a symbol of authenticity—in its knowing absurdity, contrasts with *Urbana's* underlying seriousness. The play (and the party) ends when its most earnest character has a miscarriage, an ominous indicator that not only God, but any kind of faith and conviction at all, is dead.

WOMR's new Saturday afternoon Metropolitan Opera broadcasts inspired about a hundred letters and calls of gratitude, pouring in from all over the Cape and even Nantucket. Salvatore Del Deo wrote to say, "I have grown up with the Texaco broadcasts from their very first program and I would have hated to lose that privilege after all those years." He thanked WOMR for its overall support of "the 'voice,' i.e.

opera, oratorio, and art songs," and expressed hope that younger generations would listen in: "Those of us who were lucky enough to grow up in a time when the Met opera broadcasts were a must for the entire family have to help the young people who are not so fortunate."

ART AWARDS

Provincetown pinhole photographer **Marian Roth** won the highly prized Guggenheim Award, given "on the basis of distinguished achievement in the past and exceptional promise for future accomplishment." She included in her application pictures taken with pinhole cameras made from cookie tins, cans, and the C-Scape dune shack. Her most recent images were made in a van. Provincetown/Miami artist **Necce Regis** won a Pollock-Krasner grant for her "Jet Series." **Susan Jennings** won the coveted Louis C. Tiffany Foundation grant, a biennial award supporting promising artists who have yet to receive widespread recognition.

BOOK NOTES

Jhumpa Lahiri followed Michael Cunningham as the second former FAWC fellow in a row to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Lahiri wrote her book of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, published by Mariner Press, during her 1997-98 fellowship. Former FAWC fellow **Sarah Messer's** first book of poems, *Bandit Letters*, won the Mary Roberts Rinehart Award and will be published by New Issues Press in July of 2001. *Red House*, a roving memoir of the house Messer grew up in, will be published by Viking in the fall of 2001. Look forward to the summer appearance of *Perfect Disappearance*, **Martha Rhodes'** second book of poems, and winner of the 1999 Green Rose Prize from New Issues Press. Rhodes' first book of poetry, *At the Gate*, was published by Provincetown Arts Press. **Frank X. Gaspar's**

latest book of poems, *A Field Guide to the Heavens*, published by the University of Wisconsin Press, was selected by Robert Bly to win the Brittingham Prize in Poetry. **Philip Gambone's** *Something Inside: Conversations with Gay Fiction Writers*, also Wisconsin, features interviews with writers including Dennis Cooper, Alan Hollingshurst, and Michael Cunningham, the last of which was recorded on WOMR. *Where the Sky Ends: A Memoir of Alcohol and Family*, by **M.G. Stephens**, a past contributor to *Provincetown Arts*, was published by Hazelden in 1999. Poetry Festival co-founder **Dennis Rhodes'** *Spiritus Pizza & Other Poems* was released this spring by Vital Links Media. **Sarah Blake's** *Grange House*, a story inspired by a box of love letters written by the author's great grandmother, will be out this summer from Picador USA. *Sam the Cat and Other Stories*, by former FAWC fellow and O. Henry Award winner **Matt Klam**, was published by Random House in May. Provincetown's William Mann takes on Hollywood with *The Biograph Girl*, a novel reimagining the life of Florence Lawrence, the world's first movie star, published this year by Kensington.

FINAL NOTE

Truro poet Robert Strong wintered in New York this year, supporting himself with catering gigs. He sent this report following one art-star-studded night: "It's snowing big flakes on Mott Street. Last night catered the Chuck Close opening at Pace on Greene Street. Highlights of eavesdropping: 'It helps to squint your eyes,' and 'I don't need any food as long as I have a drink in my hands.' At the end of the night Close came up to me at the bar and handed over a 'Chuck Close' flyer, under which was written, 'caught a buzz.'"

Letter from the Editor

Eileen Myles describes a certain poetic process as "putting yourself in the middle of a place and being excited and stunned by it, and trying to make sense of it in your work." I can't think of a better way to characterize *Provincetown Arts*, which, for fifteen years, has conveyed the work of hundreds of artists and writers in a town that is eminently exciting, nothing if not stunning, and, quite often, rife with an enchanting sort of nonsense that makes it all the more joyful and rewarding to capture its wonder on the page.

In last year's issue, we celebrated Provincetown's centennial as an arts colony with an emphasis on years past. This time around, it's all about now. Featured subjects—from the local kids in Mischa Richter's photographs, to Stanley Kunitz on his 95th birthday—are absolutely alive. Not just alive, but *being* alive. Which brings me back to Eileen, who once said that she moved from her Massachusetts birthplace to New York City, "to be a poet." This self-determined embodiment of one's calling, no matter how fringe it may seem, resonates in this town, which might have something to do with Eileen finding a home here a few years back.

Last fall Eileen mentioned that she would be living in Los Angeles for the winter. I told her that Musty Chiffon had just moved there, and that Sebastian Junger had been visiting for the filming of *The Perfect Storm*. Oh, she said, Sebastian and I used to live next-door to each other in the East Village. Jack Pierson, who spent a leisurely Sunday in May photographing Eileen for our cover, has also been making the P'town-NYC-LA rounds. This gets me thinking not only about what a nomadic tribe we are, but about how often our paths "coincidentally" converge. I'd bet that if someone drew a map with lines representing the journeys of people and ideas all over the country, many would begin and end, and begin again, here.

Our core section is called "Odysseys." Musty and Sebastian are there. So is Nick Flynn's memoir of his seven summers spent living on a boat in our harbor, the task of keeping the boat afloat an ersatz effort for keeping other beings correspondingly buoyed. Karin Cook recounts a trans-Atlantic

cargo flight, on which she accompanied championship show-jumping horses, also yielding revelations of an internal sort. Necce Regis reports on the art happenings of Miami, her winter home; Vincent Cleary follows the footsteps of Thoreau; Capt. Betsy recalls profound moments in Floating Neutrino history; Peter Alson describes the torment of consummating a book; Stephen Aiken interviews Cherie Nutting on her extended pilgrimage to find and photograph Paul Bowles; Melanie Braverman scribes through a friend's death to finally let her go. These are "writes of passage"—ruminations on going from here to there, whether in a literal, geographical sense, or in ways more esoteric and emotional. There are eighteen "Odysseys," and that's another coincidence—Chris Busa reminded me that Joyce's *Ulysses* contains eighteen chapters, too.

Our poetry section begins with Rebecca Wolff's essay titled "Provincetown Is the Center of the Universe," which is only somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Her solar system of Provincetown poets expands to encompass faraway stars. Ivy Meeropol selected fiction in which "the characters are evolving, going somewhere new, surprising themselves, and us, with their reactions." Art and book reviews focusing on artists and writers close to our hearts are followed by a final section called "Comm'l St.," which, with articles on everything from one of Provincetown's favorite drag artists to the rise of the new Whalers' Wharf, brings us smack back home again.

This morning I watched out my window an annual ritual—the repainting of the yellow no-parking lines on Commercial Street. It struck me that these are about the only boundaries we face around here, and that made me grateful. We can bear the imposition of an official rule or two; there's so much else sense-making to do.

Enjoy the magazine.

Jennifer Liese

- Cool for You
Soft Skull Press,
2000
- School of Fish
Black Sparrow Press,
1997
- Maxfield Parrish/
early & new poems
Black Sparrow Press,
1995
- The New Fuck You:
Adventures in
Lesbian Reading
(edited with
Lisa Vots)
Semiotext(e), 1995
- Chelsea Girls
Black Sparrow Press,
1994
- Not Me
Semiotext(e), 1991
- 1969
Hanuman Books, 1989
- Bread and Water
Hanuman Books, 1987
- Sappho's Boat
Little Caesar Press,
1982
- A Fresh Young
Voice from
the Plains
Power Mad Press,
1981
- Polar Ode
(a collaboration
with Anne Waldman)
Dead Duke Books,
1979
- The Irony
of the Leash
Jim Brodey Books,
1978



I got this black eye in an auto accident in San Antonio on the way to L.A. People on the road started acting weird towards me & I was getting depressed so I set up this exorcism w/ plaster wolves and asked Karin to take this picture of it all. Jan. '00

Never Real, Always True: An Interview with Eileen Myles

FRANCES RICHARD



EILEEN MYLES, 1980
PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE

In glossy magazines, the big interview begins with atmosphere. Eileen Myles meets me on Brewster Street, in an airy, funky, Old Provincetown atelier. We can see the bay. She is wearing black and orange Nose sneakers, a hip and clunky brand; she seems part adolescent (boy), part crone. Since moving to New York City from her native Massachusetts in 1974, Eileen has written twelve books of poetry and prose. Stints in Provincetown and Los Angeles notwithstanding, she remains an icon of Manhattan's East Village art scene, and has performed everywhere from CBGB's to MoMA, not to mention Europe, Russia, and Iceland. She has toured nationally with Sister Spit, San Francisco's all-girl spoken-word extravaganza, and has taught most recently at Art Center and Otis College of Art and Design, both in California, and at the New School for Social Research in New York. She edited a poetry magazine, *dodgers*, from 1977 to 1979; her columns and criticism have appeared in *The Nation*, *Art in America*, *Paper*, and *The Village Voice*. Write-in candidate for President of the United States in 1992, one-time assistant to poet and art writer James Schuyler, and Artistic Director of St. Mark's Poetry Project in New York: in Eileen, diverse territories touch, and this simultaneity radiates from her. At fifty, she still looks like the famous portrait Robert Mapplethorpe made in 1980.

The body is important here. Lolling and tensing, gesturing, Eileen listens so acutely it's unnerving. Pulling out her poet's notebook—the covers creased from being sat on in her back pocket, where a wallet would wear its whitened outline in her jeans—she shows me works in progress, short lines printed in black felt-tip pen. As she talks she turns the notebook, strokes and smooths it. The voice, too, is important. Eileen's speech casts light upon her writing. Her conversation spins in sweeping arcs, each question entertained from multiple viewpoints, so that her responses seem to meander and double back upon themselves and each moment of concise insight—one always comes—comes suddenly, almost as a shock. The attentive auditor (or reader) will realize, however, that she has been building toward that insight all along. Sometimes, in glossy magazines, the interviewer notes demurely how the interviewed celebrity is sexy. Eileen: a graceful, generous, somehow canine energy.

I drew a figure in my notebook, three circles that joined at one point, and lunged at it—that's it, my spot, but then I realized it was poetry or the poetics of it that I was needing to address and I've hardly been anywhere other and I want to honor the place that I stand ... To include this body, mine, the woman's as I see it, to approach this body as part of the score.

—Eileen Myles, "The Lesbian Poet," *School of Fish*

(all subsequent selections from *School of Fish*, unless otherwise noted)

FRANCES RICHARD: Origins seems a terribly traditional place to begin, but so be it because, after all, who begat whom is always interesting. Ted Berrigan famously called you "the last poet of the New York School." How does such a connection wear over time? Does the appellation still resonate for you?

EILEEN MYLES: It depends on who asks. Once I was introduced at a reading by someone whom I thought of as a Language poet, and when they described me as "New York School," I experienced it as a critique—like I was retro. But, yes, those were the writers (Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Barbara Guest) who woke me up, who gave me a sense of what an adventure being a poet could be. I was born at the end of 1949. I'm really of the mid-20th century—the end of modernism—and they were right on the cusp of modern and postmodern, and I feel an affinity with that. Some of my best friends and greatest teachers, like Jimmy Schuyler and Ted, became family in the positive sense, part of my bloodline. Ultimately, though, "New York School" just means I learned to be a poet in New York. As an aesthetic it means putting yourself in the middle of a place and being excited and stunned by it, and trying to make sense of it in your work.

and I said I simply walked and the tree turned, no the key and the bottom of the sea is flooded with light, we just get used to it the deeper and deeper we go and the harder it is to turn the key and eventually we go and it is very very dark we just get used to the light but the blues and the greys and the feelings of lostness, it's like home, it's like family.

—"School of Fish"

FR: Maybe the segue from modern to postmodern itself has to do with a change in the way we relate to location, with a mutation in our sense of belonging to a given landscape. It's the difference between assuming a particular place as your home context, even if that context is alienating, and adopting a nomadic or virtual existence where nobody really belongs anywhere.

EM: Right. New York is a placeless place. It fills and refills and fills and refills, and it's always the same and always different. It's an endless marketplace of culture—and definitely a particular kind of human thrives in that kind of structure.

FR: I read somewhere that Auden and Schuyler had both been described as "city pastoralists." So, since Schuyler was Auden's assistant and you

were Schuyler's, that positions you in this particular lineage of the *flâneur* and commentator.

EM: Which I do grab onto, in terms of understanding, even validating what I'm doing. The person who is my absolute hero and influence is Christopher Isherwood, who of course was Auden's best friend. And Isherwood's hero was Virginia Woolf.

FR: What have you been given by, or taken from, this lineage? What traits do you carry? From Woolf to Isherwood to you, or Auden to Schuyler to you, through the filter of New York?

EM: One thing I always think about—there's a movie, *The Last Clean Shirt*, that Alfred Leslie made in collaboration with Frank O'Hara. Actually, it's been screened lately in the O'Hara exhibition, which I saw in LA. All it is, is an open convertible, a T-Bird, someplace in the '60s. There's a man driving it, sort of a Middle Eastern-looking man and a very fair but dark-haired woman. The man's driving the car, down Third Avenue past Cooper Union, getting to Houston Street, turning around, making this endless loop. And he's driving silently and we can see she's yakking up a storm, and the film is silent with subtitles written by O'Hara. First he translates what she's saying, and then he translates what the man's thinking.

It's wonderful because so often subtitles—just because they're text—feel like the poem of the movie, a kind of score. O'Hara scored the movie, which is just these great visuals of this wonderful car, these handsome people and this landscape that is both unchanging and utterly different. It was kind of like yippee! and kind of like sorrow, and it was profound and excited in that way that O'Hara's voice just shifts and shifts and shifts and keeps taking in everything and letting it out. When I saw that movie I thought, "That's it." That is, in the most classic sense, who O'Hara was, even what the New York School was. The poet was like this open car in the middle of the century, at some peak moments just saying, "Yes!" and catching the shape—moving through it all in a very excited way. People who romanticize and imitate O'Hara's moment mistakenly think that abundance gets to be what it's about—that mid-century excess and heroism and triumph, which it isn't.



History has continued. It's the '70s and the '80s and the feeling changes. What I mean is there's definitely an openness and a speech-basedness, and a contemporaneity that I think is very "New York School," but what changes is the *bhāv*. That's a great word, do you know it? I got it from Isherwood's book on Ramakrishna. He talks about the bhakti yogis, whose job is to address this quality of attention or being. The bhakti yogi enters a room and he tells a story, he gets people chanting, but the goal is to address this thing in the room called *bhāv*, which is the quality of the room when people are there, and to *move* it. That's what a poet, the poet, has to do. The poet has to address the *bhāv*, not only in herself, but within the room of the culture. The world has continued to arrive, so maybe it's not an open convertible anymore. It's something else. Poetry is complexity—seeing the world in the terms it's arriving in.

I was coming through the airport the other day and there was a billboard we were all passing under, a huge transparency of a crowd of people—like Grand Central Station. But it was an ad for the Internet. It said something like "one million hits a day." I'm thinking about that *flâneur* idea of the poet. The character who lounges in the midst of the industrial crowd. But what if the crowd is virtual now—what *flâneur*? The feeling always changes.

I flutter
in my red blue
everything's
tower, this
mud of
mine moment
it's invisible
—"The Troubador"

FR: Part of the way you've served your particular *bhāv* is through participation in community projects—everything from being Director at the Poetry Project to touring with Sister Spit and curating your current reading series at Thread Waxing Space. There are these moveable-feast poetry adventures that seem to connect the dots through the years for you.

EM: I move in groups—my feeling about literature is communal and I think it's important to know, literally, who you're writing for. When I met the Sister Spit girls—Michelle Tea, Sini Anderson, et cetera—all these young dykes from San Francisco who are making up a girls' literary movement and taking it on the road like a band—what was exciting was that they had *heard* me. I was part of their history. I've tried to move poetry away from its own center.

FR: Or you've consistently stuck to your own center, where poetic practice that touches back in some ways, as we've said, to the moderns is just naturally overlapped and intertwined with new dyke aesthetics and a daily politics. The poem becomes the site where all those influences enact themselves.

EM: In the '80s I remember a friend telling me he thought I was "bringing Personism to performance." I started doing performance art, but it was out of a New York School impulse. I heard Spalding Gray and I thought, 'He's just doing poetry in a prosy, lengthy way.' David Wojnarowicz and Dennis Cooper were totally New York School poets. So was Kathy Acker. Andy Warhol knew Ted Berrigan and Ted was very Pop. You know, this poetry is all very Pop, comic book, New York speech. It's the cartoon voice of the culture. So it seems to me that all I've done is further that evolution. By the '90s, with AIDS, and my own sense of aging, and, you know, needing a dentist—then my poetry became "political." There's a consciously political content that I've brought to poems because these are those times. That's what the talking animal would be talking about now. It's a political comic book now, it's a dying comic book. O'Hara didn't have to watch his friends die around him. It's a different *bhav*.

FR: The *bhav* includes gender-consciousness in a different way now, a more explicit way.

me. What was so great about meeting this bunch of punky girls twenty years later was that I was received. But I was received *later*. It was like I had been talking to an imaginary tribe that then appeared, and that weirdly I even invented. Because when they saw my work they thought, "Oh, I can do this." I sort of created my own audience.

In me speaks
the divine
menagerie
the nectar
the blood on my hands

Girls Girls Girls!
I came to pray
—"Waterfall"

FR: Are you the intentional outlaw trailblazer, or is it more that you leapt and the net appeared?

EM: I think they're the same. I really got this when I ran for President. Often you don't know something exists until you stand up and be it, and then you catch all this stuff, it accumulates and sticks

hundred people read you." They were talking my expectations down. A poet shouldn't be thinking about fame and glory. Well, what about Joni Mitchell! She "taped her regrets to the microphone stand." A mass audience is created of an incredibly exquisite network of many little communities. I'm thinking now of comfort as a mark of success. I write for the little community where I start, and I have no idea where that message may travel. To keep working, I've got to be comfortable in the way I function and create, with the machinery I have access to now. I am loving that word, "community" again, suddenly.

FR: The exquisite network seems to extend inside you too. The President and the poet are sort of inverse types for the cultural leader, and maybe what you're talking about is the essential action of that leadership, this idea of generating or orchestrating, simply believing in, communities of cultural energy.

EM: I'm totally dazzled by how things distribute and disperse. Distribution is key. And yet, it's so unknown, how it accomplishes itself. To have a little more trust in that makes the whole process seem to work again. It's odd that I have to keep relearning this and yet every time I do, it all opens like one of those terrific dreams that I feel everybody who lives in New York has had at one point—in which they open a closet ...

FR: ... and there's a gorgeous extra room in their apartment.

EM: Huge! Sometimes it opens into all the other apartments in New York. And that's what's important, to continually rethink success and power and fame—and connect it to where you really live.

FR: Last summer at the Schoolhouse Center here in P'town, you gave a talk called "How to Write an Avant Garde Poem." In it you said, "I'm thinking of plugging the avant garde poem into a local and public understanding of daily life alone and in community." Again, there's that word, *community*, spoken with a real political ring. Replace the words "avant garde" in that sentence—"I'm plugging AIDS awareness into a local and public understanding of daily life," or "I'm plugging literacy into a local and public understanding of daily life."

EM: Right. Right right right.

FR: So how do you define the contemporary avant garde? It seems to appear in your work as a positive, even a beloved term, a politicized term, but not so much a contested one.

EM: It seems large, and that's why I like to use it again. There was time when the poetry I felt most immediately affected by split, and labels were affixed that said, "you're New York School" and "you're Language," as though these were really different things, when in fact Language came out of New York School, and New York School came out of French Surrealism and Russian Futurism and John Cage and Lana Turner. It is one flow. The thing that no one talks about is real estate. When lots of artists had lofts in the '70s there were big parties where people of different gangs danced and drank together. And they turned up in each other's



"I MOVE IN GROUPS" EILEEN WITH SISTER SPIT IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1997

EM: When I came to New York in the '70s, I didn't know I was a lesbian. I didn't want to come out. I was homophobic, or scared—I just didn't want to be a dyke. There wasn't a woman in that circle of poets, either, who could receive me and let me know I was heard. Alice Notley, who was married to Ted Berrigan, was there, and we were, and are, great friends, but she was a married woman and a mother and she was going to have a different life. There was Jill Johnston, there was Gertrude Stein—I just started to make myself up as that woman. I made the model of what I needed there to be. I put lesbian content in the New York School poem because I wanted that poem to be there to receive

to you, and reality gets created. In AA parlance it's "attraction not promotion." The right thing happens because of desire.

I just finished a new book, *Cool for You*, and the process of finding the right publisher made me pretty nuts. As usual, I was like, "Okay, I'm ready for the mainstream culture to receive me." I had that with *Chelsea Girls*, too. Both of these books were *prose*, so I thought of them as my "big books." But in fact no one in that corporate publishing world could see me "on their list." They were like, 'Ugh, this is harsh. Where's the plot?' So, I'm going with a cool, enthusiastic independent publisher, Soft Skull Press. They're doing a huge run, and it seems perfect. I've always thought a poet should think big, not small. As a young person I met writers who were already in their midlife broken heart, and they would say, "Aghh, poets, two

magazines. The fact that people stopped seeing each other socially when all those lofts got sold meant, on a certain level, that we stopped trying to understand each other's work.

FR: So an avant garde is symbiotic with the larger culture, even if it's also in opposition.

EM: Yet it has its own history. Gertrude Stein, for example, in this century, is kind of the mother of us all. If Stein's not important to you, then probably you are going off into some whole other area. I evolved the way I did because that's where I was received. I picked up Stein and I wanted to know more about *this*. I applied to a bunch of graduate schools and most of them didn't accept me and one did, and there I was only accidentally turned on by a professor to the "New York School poets," and stumbled to St. Mark's, fell out of school and then I was there. That was the poetry I was exposed to, that was the place where I grew. Maybe, for us then, "avant garde" was a way to explain the kind of theater that, say, Richard Foreman was doing, and I knew my kind of poets were related to that kind of theater. In retrospect, it was about liking that kind of band, too. Richard Hell. Patti Smith. It meant knowing about things outside of the center—of convention—that was a given in my world.

I think it's about the center moving, too. The first time I saw the word "mainstream" was in the '80s. Some article called "Mainstreaming Allen Ginsberg," when his *Collected Poems* was coming out. And I thought, 'How odd, they make it sound like they're making him bigger.' It just meant they were giving him a big book, but Allen was already huge, global. Right away there seemed to be this misnomer, the "mainstream." Since then it's become the flood everybody is trying to jump into to exist, and if you're not in it you're invisible.

o eat me read
me something
I am the daughter
of substitution
—"Merk"

FR: Do you think that sense of invisibility is new? You were talking before about being trained as a poet not to expect glory.

EM: Right. But it feels different somehow. Actually maybe it only feels different in terms of being older. At this point in my life, with a huge body of work, I do feel threatened sometimes—when I think I face annihilation as a woman, as opposed to the situation of male poets. I'm thinking, 'Oh, they still think I'm a woman! Unbelievable! I'm going to suffer this female obliteration.' Even looking at someone like Muriel Rukeyser, who's so important and great, and realizing there were twenty years where you could not find her work. Stein too—impossible to find. The danger feels more personal than it did when I was younger. I feel more mortal, and my work feels more mortal, too. I feel more in need of finding some way either to win, you know—knock knock knock and make the huge door open—or, whether that happens or not, realizing the door has to be open here, within, first, just to write.

FR: Speaking of lines of inheritance, that's another important trajectory to trace—from Stein, to Rukeyser, bounce, into the present.

EM: Then you really are looking at a female lineage, which is pretty amazing.

FR: And one that is acute in terms of language experimentation and political experimentation. All these different registers of formal and social play with both identity and poetry. So how do you address yourself to a present, contemporary avant garde?

EM: I like the term. It's a little pedantic, but if I'm not that, what am I? "Experimental" has a much more tentative sound to me than "avant garde." I always think of Bob Perelman saying that "experimental" sounded to him like you have some test tubes and a white lab coat and you might just blow up the science building. Bernadette Mayer always liked the word and used it.

FR: "Avant garde" has that military connotation. You *meant* to blow up the science building.

EM: Yeah. You had to! It's like "queer." It's taking on a term of contempt and saying, "No, I'm proud. I'm proud to be avant garde." I might feel the same way about the name "New York School."

FR: Well, how does the avant-garde relate to your choices as a writer? How important is it for you to theorize what language is, or what it does, on its own terms? Do you ponder the difference between, say, a word as a transparent sign for a real thing versus a word as simply a sound-cluster that's independent and irreducible?

EM: I don't know. I think language is frightening. I experience it both of those ways at various points, often in the same piece of writing.

you can name a cloud in Latin
you can name a wind
in Shakespeare
when "it" soliloquizes
do we turn & whisper
bill speaks
I like the crunch of
Rosie's jaw on
science diet
the caw of her
throat but
my language tends
to personalize
in the Rain
—"Sullivan's Brain"

FR: Language is protean, and inevitably it flips back and forth from literal to abstract? The flips are organic?

EM: Yes. Part of what's fun is to keep distorting what it is I think I'm doing. Like metaphorical writing, for example. I think of myself as not a metaphorical poet. That's part of how I define my work. But at extreme moments of personal devastation, I might write an incredibly metaphorical poem as almost the only way out of some bad feeling. So even the very things that I think I don't do sometimes seem to be the cure for what I'm needing to move. Like the way rhymes seem to be dripping with irony, so you use them.

FR: Say more about what you mean by metaphor.



EM: "Metonym" is an important word for me. I'm endlessly paddling around the word and thinking about what it means in my writing and in other people's writing. Gertrude Stein being metonymic with "a rose is a rose is a rose." It seems like a filmmaker's term, a prose term. Metonym is about proximity—an open universe, not a closed one. In O'Hara's movie, it's the car. Sort of a non-literary way of being literary. I use my own name in my stories because rather than inventing some symbolic name for my narrator, I use a real piece of me. I think of New York School poets as metonymic as opposed to metaphoric.

FR: Metaphor says, "This thing equals that one, this is similar to that." Whereas metonym just places things in proximity without directing the relationship. Or at least that's the argument I've heard. Does that fit with what you're saying? The metaphor feels closed?

EM: It feels sweet. Sentimental. And it also seems hierarchical, that's what I think about most. As soon as you've got comparison there's a sense of beauty or godliness, an ideal that makes me uncomfortable. An inside and an outside. Within the poem and in the world. The metonym is travelling. Repetition is metonymic, in that a word always changes in relation to what it's next to.

... Its beauty is
beyond me. I start
backing my car up
you girls & your structuralism
post haste have taught
me so much. The angry
dog shaking shaking
the metonymic
bird. Not daughter
but slaughter.

—"Sullivan's Brain"

FR: So in the moment, as you're placing one thing next to another, what tuning fork are you listening to? How do you build a poem?

EM: I think what I follow are the edges of attention itself. Something, usually a little piece of language, starts me—it locks in and seems to open some file in my mind that's been agitated into speech. It feels like a kind of unwrapping. I have a strong experience of dictation. I've always felt that writing the poem is listening. I've talked about this many times but I've never found a satisfying way to express it because I'm saying a lot of different things and they all feel the same. I feel like I'm drawing. I'm paying attention to something, and some part of me someplace is doodling, but it's no real place and the only thing that's really getting done is this nice kind of printing that I love. I'm always very into my materials, and I usually use a little notebook. The size of the notebook often dictates the size of the lines. I get these at a stationery store on Avenue A. Mostly I feel I'm experiencing a kind of tension release that feels curt and tough. I don't know too much about it while it's going on. There's a little bit of the obliviousness of sex that feels really intelligent to me about it. The language is one I've learned, that I know and have developed. I learned to write poems from other poets. The more poetry I read the more tricks and disciplines, the more ways to couch the line I've learned. I've learned about tension. But it is some inner singing that's going on. It feels like drawing, it feels like illustration. There's this intangible thing that must be drawn somehow, and I'm doing it in words. There's a picture that's unfolding in some way. I feel very controlled about sound and length. I can feel that viscerally, and I don't know its source, of course. Except probably the history of all the poetry I've ever heard. And the size of my experience. I have an economy, a metabolism or energy flow that's mine. Sometimes I think the length of the poem is a given before the poem even begins. So it's a matter of not wasting myself, so that I keep giving the poem some rope so it can keep coming. I can feel when I go into unnecessary tributaries and rivulets, and think, 'ooh, bad one.' Then

Writing is just making a mark.
It's your mortality, your need to
exist. It is probably totally linked
to feeling endangered.

I'll flash back to the point where it was alive and keep going. Something clearly is being spooned out that I have to follow. My model of it is sort of tightrope walking in the dark and trying to feel my balance. It's that sense when you've finally gotten good at something, like driving a car. A bicycle. It becomes one with my body. I know how to shift my weight, how to move, and I always feel that too in relation to content. There's a gradient I'm trying to follow and I have to keep shifting to keep up with it. It's the unknown, it's the landscape I'm negotiating. Every skill I've got is going into that, not paying too much attention to it, but knowing when I'm connected.

FR: It's amazing how similar the descriptions become.

EM: Poets talking about what they're doing?

FR: Yeah. Radically different work that seems to be made through similarly mysterious processes.

EM: The difference comes from who you are, and how you read. It's that thing when you walk into a room full of people you don't know, and how do you keep meeting *that* kind of person? You go through all these relationships and you think, how did I know that this was another one of *them*? How you find work that speaks to you. Poetry comes from poetry. When I teach that seems like all I can give people, just piles of influence. That list comes to be, really, what defines you as a poet. Out of all that mess you start making fresh leaps, which are about the fact that you have pulled together this strange bunch of influences. Other subject matters, like visual art, are important. Going into a completely other territory and thinking hard about it gives you something to bring back to poetry.

I remember Jimmy Schuyler years ago, looking at a copy of this poetry publication. Jimmy himself was on the cover, and I'd had a number of poems rejected by them, so I was like, "Do you like this?" And he said, "Well, I think anything that's all poetry is pretty boring, don't you, babe?" What strikes me as academic in poetics, for anybody of any stripe, is the idea that poetry is the only thing you're looking at or hearing. That seems barren.

FR: So the poem has to be sort of promiscuous with other arts?

EM: We as poets often don't get those kinds of experience. We don't always get out of our jerky little circles, night after night standing around at the same readings. A lot of my formative poet-experiences have been accidents. When I got sober in the '80s, I needed a job. I mean, I'd had millions of jobs but I needed to do something that *looked* like a job. They were looking for a director of the Poetry Project, and that was sort of perfect, because I was qualified. So I went through that particular



hell of being the poet directing the poetry organization—and what a nightmare. What I learned about poetry in those two or three years was astonishing, because every poet is the *only* poet.

FR: On the level of interpersonal politics, you mean?

EM: Yeah, but also the isolation of the poet's position, within the poetry community and outside of it. How poetry is perceived by other institutions and other art worlds. P.S. 122 was in its heyday then. The Poetry Project had been hot in the '60s and '70s, and I quickly got this idea that most institutions have ten years—then you become an *institution* rather than a movement. P.S. 122 was in that hot time. So just because I was the Director of the Poetry Project, they invited me to come and read at their benefit. I didn't want to be embarrassed droning in front of these dancers and performers, so it behooved me to memorize a poem. A performance is keyed to live rhythms, and even if the poem is already written, the poet can be improvising, working with when they stop and start, with the silence. The most important piece in poetry, it seems to me, is silence. That's your grip. When will I say my next word, how long do I hold this pause. There's very little vocabulary for those performative questions in poetry, but I think we all use them intensely. So I stood up and recited, and I received so much back. After that I got more into that world. They used to do field trips—there'd be me, a dancer, a performance artist, maybe a film, and they'd take us to the Brooks Museum in Memphis or the Walker Art Center or someplace. To be that poet was so much fun. It was like being in a traveling circus, and it seemed that was how poetry should be. Not exclusively, but to be in a context next to other arts and be given an audience as one of an array of live offerings. To have the opportunity to be an entertainment for a change.

Like many others I became an artist. I choose not to dwell on that cultural accident. Let's say I have always been brilliant in the realm of play.

—“Light Warrior,” *Chelsea Girls*



FR: In a way, as you said before, what you perform in your work is the character “Eileen Myles.” There’s a particular universe of details that are hers. Speaking in the accent of Arlington, Mass., or having this experience of alcoholism, or of the downtown scene in these particular decades, or of being Irish Catholic, or a lesbian. These very specific autobiographical, demographic cues—and yet all these juicy details don’t necessarily coalesce into character. Stylistically they function as a cascade of textures more than a narrative. It’s like the line from Artaud you’ve taken as the epigraph in *Cool For You*, “jamais real, toujours vrai.” In your work this figure called Eileen Myles may always be true, but she’s never real. So I wonder if you could talk about those details, and your use of those markers of individual life.

EM: They seem part and parcel with why I write. Writing is just making a mark. It’s your mortality, your need to exist. It is probably totally linked to feeling endangered. Arlington, lesbian, et cetera—I’m just constructing a monument to those things. But, I guess because I’ve come up in a sophisticated art-making culture, some other part of me knows that’s not enough. “I want to talk about myself and say that I exist and these are the details I am made of.” Okay, but how can you keep doing that again and again? How can you keep living a life every single day, take the next step forward, or bear weather, or continue to speak. There’s a tremendous challenge, to take that whole sea of familiar details and make them flow and shift. How can you keep renewing the autobiographical impulse. I’m completely in love with doing that. It seems so dangerous. Dangerous in a bad-art way. How to be incredibly—I want to say self-serving, though that’s not exactly true. Self-deploying?

If I focus on the part of me that’s divine—and smeared, well that feels real to me.

—“Candlelight,” catalog essay for the exhibition, “Message to Pretty”

Also, there’s a lot of class stuff in the internal voice that says, “Don’t think you’re so special.” In some ways my whole art impulse derives from saying, “I know I’m not special.” My exaltation comes because I’m female, because of my class background—my parents didn’t go to college—and because in so many ways I shouldn’t be making art. My work is inherently defiant. I can go on and on, and I feel like I’m digging a hole by giving more autobiographical justifications for why it’s true and necessary, but it just is.

When I was a kid I could draw. That was my talent growing up, that was what I was good for. And so it always seemed to me that if I couldn’t think of anything else to do I could have a comic strip. Comic strips got syndicated, and you could make a living that way. But the problem was that I could never draw the same drawing again. It seemed to me that you had to develop a character and draw the same drawing again and again and again, and then you could be alive.

FR: Because you’d have a reliable vehicle to get yourself from frame to frame.

EM: Right. Which is exactly what I’m doing. Except in words. My vehicle, my cartoon, coincided with say, Warhol and the soup can, or *Interview* magazine, these really boring interviews with people saying “Um.” I thought ‘Wow, boring. Great!’ Warhol’s movies, people just talking—pouring all that detail into poetry.

FR: So that character becomes the way you continue to reinvent autobiography? You have a character you can keep drawing the same way in different scenes?

EM: Yes. Totally. I don’t think I ever thought that until now, but it’s true. Of course, there are certain ways I didn’t know who I was until I developed that character, so it gets a little dicey. Really the character is more firm than I am. It’s weird when people address you like you’re your work—and I guess that I of all people should *be* my work, because I’ve kind of created this voice that talks me through my life. So of course it’s easy to get up and do her in a reading. You know, because I know what she sounds like. Again, it’s the comic strip. I die for the printing in cartoon speech bubbles. As visual notation it has the kind of rigor and excitement I experience when I’m writing. It’s just that, for me, the pictures are invisible—the poem is purely the balloons, and the balloons are infinite.

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Josh Neufeld is the co-creator of the alternative comic book Keyhole.



COMIC BY JOSH NEUFELD (WITH TEXT BY EILEEN MYLES)

TO GO HOME

EILEEN MYLES

I MIGHT BE MAKING THIS UP, but the house I grew up in only cost my parents \$13,000. It seems so cheap for a house, even a house in Arlington, even a house right off Arlington Center, at the end of a dead end street. Even a house with a sub shop on the corner, and a dry cleaners opposite that. My house you had to cross the train tracks to get to. To watch the Boston & Maine railroad clank by in the morning and those men reading papers going to work. It was so sad to learn that those men weren't coming from Maine, but Lexington, the next town over. But I didn't learn that for years, not until I was in college at the University of Massachusetts where I learned facts like that. In a state University you learn about your roots, what you've been seeing all your life.

I was afraid of our house. Not like my brother who saw it once from Lombard Street, which was essentially the back, and there it was, bright as a moon, my house from the other side. It made Terry sick, it made me happy, that there was an "out." Somewhere I could stand and look at our house. My brother resisted this point of view, I thought it was hope. Our house was so cheap because of what happened in it. To the two girls who once lived in the room, my sister and mine. It's amazing to think that we knew.

Mrs. Loblino lived downstairs. It was a two family house, and we bought it and she was already there, a link to the past. We bought it and she didn't leave her home. We left her there. I don't think she died. She was there for a little while. She had see-through curtains different from ours on her door. She was an older woman, probably a widow and she became my mother's friend because my mother instantly became a daughter to women of the right age, she would be their younger friend. And they would give her things and show her things. Next door were the Aulenbachs and Mr. Aulenbach who was quite bald gave my mother the first red rose of the season. I seem to remember it that way, and I don't know how his wife felt who was well and alive. They had a white trellis crawling with roses and this man would give a red rose to my mother and it would be part of her joy, of her sweetness. She was such a daughter, my mom. She was so perfect. Mrs. Loblino gave us sauce.

I remember the foreign bowl of it, the deep orange red with big sausages bobbing, a meatball or two. She'd make too much and at some point she'd ship some up to us. The phone would ring. A black phone, all rounded and harsh, heavy and adult. My mother would pick it up. *Terrveilecunbridgie* ... would you go downstairs. I'd come up carrying it. It'd be a tureen, a really big bowl, pink Italian looking, with this tremendous foreign food dark orange bobbing. I can't remember the woman's face, I remember the bowl, her handing it to me. I was looking around. I think Loblino had a bun.

Behind our house, on the side that eventually led to Lombard Street, there was a yard. There was a big fence right below our second floor door, our back door, and there was those people's yard and their immense garden. And you know my mother was dropping it, putting down a pan on a rope and the people down there who she simply smiled at their garden

said Genny would you like some swiss chard. She would. I remember that stuff. My mother liked to grow things and she was a fan of people who had roses and vegetables and liked to cook, they were old these people and they missed their families and my mother had one and we were endlessly receiving shipments of food from these people.

I want you to get the hang of the house, where I lived from three to twenty one, eighteen years. Sort of interment, sort of beautiful. The house had an immense chestnut tree in its yard and beyond that many houses and then the miracle of Spy Pond with, in its exact center, an island. Revolutionary spies hid there, we had been told. Everyone's worlds are flooded with stories. Legends of the past. My town was so old and cool. A little wooden house sat there on the edge of the pond. You could see the pond frozen, my mother could watch us, skating. The characteristic of Arlington I know the most is our visibility. My place in her eye. Moving through my town, the overall sensation of mother, watching. At some point they knocked down the wooden house which I failed to mention was the Arlington Boys Club. A source of distress for me. Where's the Girls Club I screamed. They flung up a larger structure, much larger and it was blue. They wrote the words in white type on its outside. Not just above the door. Arlington Boys Club. It blocked my mother's view of the pond and I could never look at that blue building without wincing at the crime, the erasure of girls. My mother felt bad because she couldn't see the pond. Though we weren't skating anymore.

What's important is the sauce. The hands of the woman downstairs, her old seventy-year-old hands extending this meal to us. There may have been pasta too. There was. I don't think she died in our house.

I asked my mother once. I was sitting at her table. Did you learn to make this sauce from Rosie. She was my Aunt's upstairs neighbor, in Somerville. Their house was a three-decker which they didn't own, rented for years. Rosie was the landlady, the wife of the owner, Frankie. Their name was Marcone. I thought of sound. The smell of the hallway was theirs, the incredible odor of red tomato sauce, cheese and oil, the delicious stink of Italian food, my favorite, wafting, inhabiting, coming down. There were newspapers, there was linoleum, baseball and yells. But mostly there were smells. My aunt's sauce was derived from the methods of Rosie. And yours, Mom. *Mrs. Loblino*. Of course, of course. She was proud of her independence. Her learning from Loblino. And Loblino saved the girls.

The people who owned the house before us were this woman and this man. The man was not the girls' father and the woman worked nights and he would, you know, do things to the girls. They weren't supposed to tell, he told them that, some kind of threat and they didn't for a long time, they were like our age. Me and Bridgie's. I just remember being eleven or twelve, and someone telling us about this. But eventually the girls told Mrs. Loblino, who was probably handing them some sauce, which is better than a gun, which is like safety. They told her while she was giving them food, and she went inside and picked up the heavy black phone, I bet Mrs. Loblino had the heaviest, and you didn't even dial, you just said give me the police, she did that and they came and the man went to jail. The girls were free. So I knew two things. This had happened in my room where I lived with my sister, we knew evil things had happened in the dark there and we could always feel it, we always could, and that sauce was good.

*Excerpted from Cool for You,
forthcoming from Soft Skull
Press in November 2000.*



DOUG PADGETT, UNTITLED, 1997

f r o m S k i e s

b y e i l e e n m y l e s

You think it's one color but it's not. Closer and closer the folds appear not a deeper blue grey but a heavier one and finally just inches above the trees it's a small bright seam full of smoke, not really bright but allowing the day as much as it needs.

There's this gesture where one part of god is pointing at the other part. The fingers of the sky, a day diving down a hill in which you feel accepted.

All the sex radicals and the buildings, brown and grey and green tipped on Columbus Day heading to Liberty and I saw a yellowish sky probably dirty and blue scooped clouds with a thin plane slipping through like a tiny neon fish in my aquarium when I was ten. The fish pokes through a series of brighter white and pale blue veils of sky it's the bouncing ball of my eye. Grabs of smoke, glistening balls of clouds so still and just hovering over the knotty landscape of buildings popping up. And something chimed as we move through the water.

*Excerpted from Skies,
forthcoming from Black
Sparrow Press.*

There are the
stripes of
my day
the lines
that cross
the streets
that carry me

the knowing language
of the
almost night
the cough
of the throat
the pressing
blue
I'm pressing
through

Wickety morning
my hand
can write
the shivering
metal of
black spade
leaves jutting
out from
the morning
pond

it's like
my dogs
talk to the
water, my
lowered head
appreciates

then the
jingling
shift a
lull &
a distant dove
No goose

There isn't
more but
the wind
rules the day
on childhood
pond I was
never alone,
the horses
& the sexy
teenagers

it's empty
aching beautiful
lonely pond
now

the reeds I
thought I'd
get back
to are
still, but
their chewing
has a
nutty hollow
sound, the
he he he

of goose
geese

that's right
hit me on
the shoulder
with a sign
of my impending
death,
Yellow Leaf.

The whole mess
of it troubles me.
The sketchy little
lumps, they seem
inspired by the
area the moods
& clumps of trees
take, climbing up-
wards, it just goes
on its side, and
fills a lavish
area dead on,
it seems wolfish
the appetite of
this colony. It's
moving after all
and the boat
is plowing into
grey, heaping
piles of it on
the horizon, we
seem to be very
right, and
that's our immediate
future, hungry
grey not blue.

Doing the sky has
supplanted my
need for photographs.
It sits, the camera,
like a dark little
plug in my bag. The
sky meanwhile
is a sad blue green
just an inch of it.
Mostly full over that
a thin coarser ripple
of grey with thin
tears of a brighter
blue above. But we
still go right and

there is an arc in
the sky now, a
big blue one. It's
my hope & a
bird flies through it
and there's the
flag whapping in
its breeze,
the whirligigs in
the crows nest
twirling & we see
houses and trees
the oily water,
red cranes, where's
my friend Lorraine
and a hint of
garnet is in

the cloud overhead
There's clouds
painted on clouds
is rusty russet
the sky now, smooth
like old cream. There's
a small piece of
dark blue over
there to the right
but the boat
keeps turning away.
Our moments are
so damn fast the
turn of the boat
my clumsy pen
my heart beating

there's a sweet
white one like
a big fish, one
end just seems
to end—get
just a beat away,
a faint vertical
neighbor vaguer
or a funnel of
moving smoke
like industry or
the world

a cloud
is a crack
in a life
a prayer
of white

A Young Swan

I am ready

I a young
swan

full horizon
fading

I smell man,
ham
the aging
animal

there she is
down there
in her
yellow

boat

a perfect
serve

the scratches
of white
upon the
water

O perfect
cloud

indivisible
liberty,

and over there
less

rosy
like the sky
leaves
everything
in the
morning

the tree
less bliss
of the

sky, persistent

hum

These might
be why
I die

these 4 men
we add
up to

something

nose scrunch

who won

the name

the plane
contest

my submission
was cranberry
skies

the message
was if
you put
it in
the mail

it's yours

c'mon

fat books
full of
free things

and career
brochures

I pray
to the
dead frequently
since
they pile

up to
me

he would
have brought
my letter
further
than this

to die
with vacationing
strangers

look at Boston
being diagonal

my mother
tilts
along

the purple
sky arights
itself

the red buildings
of Cambridge

and today
bright grey

swan was
the name
of my street

and the
letter man
was Dad

and I
the
little poem

a frequent
flyer

looking
at a
cloud

glad to
be awake

aiming
for Rose

Crazy Limb

If letters were
as important as numbers
I would begin

to write clear
the count matters
words swirl
in a meaning of marks
marks count; school's in
always, how much is
all. I want to know.

Big harpoons
of fish-shaped
clouds

she said
perhaps
your idea
wil rise
up again

& it has:

city-sky,
half-sound

Writing

I can
connect

any two
things

that's
god

teeny piece
of bandaid

little folded
piece
of bandaid

I ran
to the
bathroom

to see
my face

sometimes
I don't
want to
see my
face in

the mirror

sometimes
I can't
bear
my thoughts

sometimes
I can't
do anything

but that's
okay

bandaid
book
god

that's
right

Nameless

don't be rehearsing
be doing
it the first
time

suddenly
a blue
cloud
is in
the sky

and then
it's the
sky

The Center

This is a place
where we can
just sit
flesh of a
caucasian coloured
building

now don't
change your
mind

it's Allen St.

the sky is
my favorite
color
well one of
them

it's just something
in terms
of color
blue, certainly,

it's a very
wide cut
above dark
but this
blue has
such certainty
never more
blue than
this &

one
that is
soft

that's right
now lie
down
while I
see it through

the trees,
the tickling
hands of
my friends
my favorite
in the
world

I love
the ite
of favorite

when it
comes to
favoring
liking &
loving &
choosing all
your life
and
one sky
meets all

the trees
you've
ever known
in a long
squirt
of light &
it's still
not night

the lights
are neon
& we get
to rest

that's it
my animal
this broad
stoop is
a raft
I will
continue to
be young
until I'm
famous

and snug
in this
exactitude
the act
of waning
choosing

I'll write
while it's
light.

My mind's
pretty
juicy

pretty crayon-
y

Full moon.

Annie Dillard

Slippery when wet,
I'll never forget

Itself

The television's

blaring in art
college & I've
just eaten

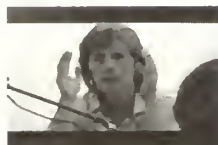
the cake
I smelled

in the gallery
one boy
bends to another
outside
smokers
I should take everything
back
my smokes & my youth
but I can't
but look at y
the small one (in youth)
its tail
bending in to another
kingdom. I
like all
of it
She above, who was
briefly rose, orange
the smokers
are gone
and I seem to be
thinking of
the ocean
and that must
be home
a cap a hood
of it
the sky has a
hat, a darker
husband; She's
everywhere
crossing the industry's
vines, its persistent
wires that
hum across america
& I do work:
I sing of you your
splashiness, your
highness your majesty
smokey blue sky,

cloud like an elbow
your fair inverse
crook just a bore
a weird california
tree. No name, the
extended bones
sprinkling
of triangle leaves
at otis, the
name of the school
there, they're
smoking again
& I want, I want
my yearning
has me look up
again your pinks
& your blues
this simple day in
February is dying
I've got 20 years
or 2. The bars of
the coke machine
reflecting
in the
window, seem
glued to
the girders
outside, where I go
Visitor's Center
The sky
pale blue
& I
applaud
the song
of my
car
Cat
I think of you as scratched
bristles hit
zooming a train squeaks into Trenton
pair of fags viciously feeding

they don't stop eating
everywhere women work
their butts off
tapping into the station
I thought I'd look
I'd arrive writing
hoo
yes I'd arrive writing
hoo
you arrive in the bones in my chest
no small world, no large
mastodon bones
her fingers are in her mouth
his phone to his ear
our sleepy civilization
I would say an american poet
that's all I would
be known as
sits.
And no one holds the camera
hold & look
carry your bags
the scream, the absolute scream of his
cardboard
food
what could be more fun
than getting killed
this absolute way
the British people never
talk when I need
them
they put all this fuss around their vowels
it is an island accent
the lap of language
useless
I suppose the next one will be the american
planet
planetary, that's what I want to
be, oh my desire to live till
I die to be known as living, casting
this fucking shadow
let me fall on you
be in my dark
sheer blue
so the sky is my hat.
oh sheer blue
so the sky be my hat.

S k y ' s t h e L i m i t



Eileen Myles: My name is Eileen Myles and I'm the Schoolhouse's poet this summer and this is a panel called "Sky's the Limit." This is



Jack Pierson: So I'm here to talk about the sky vis-à-vis a guy. I'm going to read you a little something and see if anybody might take a guess about

who is being written about. It says, "When he appears at the stage door, a thin young man who is 24 years old surrounded by ushers and body guards, the cries of the crowd reach a new pitch. His clothes have been torn from his body, his face scratched. Only the brute force of his guardians gets him through the press of humanity and into his waiting automobile. There are long frightening minutes before the car is able to move, leaving a wake of running teenaged females. Some stumble and fall. Many more sit and sob uncontrollably at the curbside as the limousine speeds out of sight."

Audience members: [guessing] Michael Jackson ... Sinatra ... Elvis ... Ricky Martin.

JP: We're all pretty familiar with Ricky Martin hysteria right now. Well, if you can, imagine that transferred to a point in 1951 to this guy this is written about, whose name is Johnnie Ray. This name could have been just as easily shouted out, especially between Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley, which is where Johnnie Ray finds himself lost, as opposed to remembered, because, unbelievably enough at that time, he was busted in a men's room for lewd and lascivious acts. Just like George Michael, but in 1951. He had just made a movie with an Irving Berlin score, with Marilyn Monroe, Mitzi Gaynor, Danny Kaye. He was in a position to be a huge star. He had the number one record and the number two record on whatever the charts were at that time. You've heard his music, but unless you're really old, or really weird like me, you wouldn't know who he is.

I'm not kidding about the hysteria. This was the first time since Frank Sinatra that girls in particular expressed this freaked-out hysteria in the presence of someone. How this relates to my work—there are things that happen that perhaps you don't notice because they just keep staying around. Like cars and telephones. But at this time no one had ever not stood at the microphone exactly still and sang. He was the first one to grab the microphone. He was the first one to drop to his knees at the microphone, to wander around the stage with the microphone. He was a freak. He wasn't handsome. He wasn't beautiful. He was deaf—he wore a hearing aid. Younger people whose fandom includes Morrissey remember a period when Morrissey of the Smiths wore a

hearing aid—that was because of Johnnie Ray. He was praised more in England than here because the publicity didn't follow him that far, so he always retained a certain stardom in England. When you hear this song it's unfathomable to believe that anyone ever freaked out to it or that it was considered the roots of rock and roll.

And so the way he comes into this sky thing is that the number two song, which was the flip side of the number one song, was called "Little White Cloud That Cried." I'm going to play it for you and see if you can imagine.

[plays tape] "I went walking down by the river/feeling very sad inside/and all at once I saw in the sky/the little white cloud that cried./He told me he was very lonesome/and no one cared if he lived or died."

The next song, "Cry," you'll possibly know:

[plays tape] "When your sweetheart sends a letter of goodbye/it's no secret you'll feel better if you cry."

Anyway, "cry" was his big thing.

He sort of lost it. He came back from this triumphant show at the London Palladium to the news of Elvis Presley. They asked him when he got off the airplane what he thought of Elvis Presley, because at this moment, having left America and come back, he was Elvis Presley, so to this ordinary question, he said, "What is Elvis Presley?" He really hadn't heard about this thing that made him obsolete.

Why am I talking about this as an artist? I guess I either grandiosely or pathetically identify with him as an artist or as a mishap. He went on in the '60s to entertain at nightclubs. He had a lucrative life and his friendships were with the greats and people adored him and he sang this sort of lachrymose, sentimental stuff to café society. And before he was a hit he performed it in strip clubs or negro dinner clubs in Detroit and it just seems implausible to me that this little skinny freak with a hearing aid and a full face of makeup could hold the room in a situation like that with "Little White Cloud That Cried." Four million sold. I'm always thrown by that "rose so high fell so far," and the whole point of me telling you about this is that vis-à-vis that song I thought it was important for me to let people know about something they might not know about because of the constellation of the environment at that time.

Somebody told me that Johnnie Ray had a long-term boyfriend who still lives in Provincetown, who I haven't met yet. It's not like I'm some big

Helen Wilson. Helen is an amazing painter, lately especially of skies. John Kelly, aka Joni Mitchell, aka John Kelly, is a singer, director, actor, performer. Jack Pierson is a lot of people's favorite artist. I think that's the simplest way to put it. Frances Richard is a poet and an art critic and a brilliant conversationalist and thinker. We had dinner a few weeks ago and I'm still rearranging my mental bookshelves with what she spoke of that night. There's one more person coming and that is Molly Benjamin. She is a fisherman and a writer, a columnist for the *Cape Cod Times* and she also writes about books for the *New York Times*.

Most of my adult life I've lived in New York City so I continually look up and see stone and that's been my adult experience quite a lot except—mostly in the spring or fall—I'd come to a city block and look from the east side to the west side and see a pretty color, like pink. This long vertical piece of sky would be my experience of it. So a couple of years ago when I started living for a serious amount of time in Provincetown, I was overwhelmed with this sky thing and it's become a new character in my life. I'm a poet and I've been writing at it and on it and around it and through it. Then I noticed when I went back to New York it was there again and it's become this endless source of inspiration.

The people who are here—I'd like to know what they think about just about anything, so I would also like to know what they think about the sky. But of course the whole idea of inviting people to talk about a particular thing creates a public question, and it seems to me that when you give people a question in public what they always answer is whatever it is they were thinking about themselves personally. People quickly twist things to their own devices. So this is sort of a two-pronged panel. Like many of us I've been on panels and to panels, and often they ask these painful brainy questions and you have to go into a spinal twist just to unload the question before you begin. I often wondered why there aren't soft topics, and the sky is one of them. I don't know where this panel is going at all and that's what's exciting to me and I'm really glad you came for it.

Johnnie Ray freak. It's not that I think he's the world's greatest singer. I went through a period of really worshipping him and the whole story of him, and made a lot of work around him, but I've also taken pictures of the sky and stuff like that and that's why I'm here this evening.



Frances Richard: As Eileen foresaw, I'm just going to talk about what I've been thinking about, and it isn't actually a thought but a sensation. Lately, when I ask myself, How do I feel? the answer is, I feel like a blowing curtain. And there is something very trite for me about this image. You can probably picture it. There's the unseen but obviously open window, the unfelt but implied breeze, and there's this sort of gauzy panel that bellies out and sucks back in. The window is bright but otherwise invisible; the curtain is long and down past the window's knees. The cloth is pale and made of cotton, or perhaps silk, or muslin—which is a word that's just the right mix between pioneer women sewing undergarments and backstage at the theater. There's something about the way the curtain moves, the kind of indolent, snaky way it moves, and it's both thin and voluptuous, enticing and bland.

So I've been riffing on this image of the blowing curtain. I think it's in the same family of tropes as a distant dog barking at night, or a radio coming very faintly through the wall. It's kind of a readymade for melancholy. It's a synecdoche—it's the part standing in for the whole—for a certain kind of separation or longing that's ambient; it's not attached to any specific thing. Also, as an image, it has a summery, feminine, mildly erotic quality that makes it thoroughly commodifiable. It's the kind of picture that sells natural soaps or full-spectrum lightbulbs, or a certain kind of novel. So I'm reluctant to take as my personal emblem something that could be on the cover of a Pottery Barn catalog, but it's been appearing in my life recently as a kind of mnemonic device.

The blank, glowing window and the responsive, see-through fabric have come to signify in my mind what I've been calling diaphany. Diaphany is the state or quality of being diaphanous. It's both a physical and an emotional state, but mostly physical. This might sound very elegant but it's actually much more trippy than pretty. As a physical feeling, it's psychedelic and slippery; it's the sensation of anxiety dreams. It masters you completely but it remains vague, and it has the special brutality only a very yielding thing can muster. It's akin, maybe, to what the novelist Tim

O'Brien describes as the experience of soldiers in the rice paddies in Vietnam. They would become convinced that out in the fog they were hearing a cocktail party or a stadium full of people. There's an aggressive, sort of suffocating softness to diaphany, like being dosed in inappropriate circumstances.

When diaphany grips you, you look at your arm and think, How odd, that looks just like someone's arm. Or you hear yourself talking—this is happening to me right now—and there's a transatlantic phone call delay inside you. Your brain proclaims, I'm going to say something now, and then there's a long blank space, and then you hear something being said, which may or may not be the thing the brain initially geared up for. Earlier today I was imagining myself saying these words in this room and I was nervous, so I thought, Okay, visualize it—there's going to be a mirror over here and people sitting there. And that, in fact, is what I'm seeing. I know that I'm in Provincetown and all of this is taking place right now. But what I'm feeling is I could just as easily be in Brooklyn, hallucinating. So location seems untrustworthy—location doesn't feel reliably different from imagination. They're both just textures. And that's diaphany. It's intrusively bizarre, but it's covert. You can do everything you normally do—talk and eat and travel and show up at your appointments—but you're sort of hydroplaning on this layer of insubstantialness or unreality. I would assume that everybody does this all the time, except that I never did it until recently.

My grandmother, whom I was very close to and who raised me, died in February. And her daughter, my mother, died when I was a child. She was thirty-one when she died and I'm thirty-one now, and all of this probably has to do with my diaphany. If you read about mother-loss, or any kind of trauma, you'll read a lot of similar description. Then it becomes like any phenomenon—once you start looking for it, you see it everywhere. So diaphany is related to what the impressionists do, and diaphany is at the core—though there is not core exactly, and that's the point—but diaphany is Virginia Woolf; it's Emily Dickinson. It's the thing that avant-garde poetic theorists talk about when they say that “language is indeterminate.” You have the thing, and the name for the thing, and the twain shall never meet. The space in between is diaphany. And the Buddhists, too, are dealing with it when they say there is no self. If you do your striptease of the self and take away veil after veil, you're not going to find some essential truth; you're just going to get nothing, and a pile of veils on the

floor. And that's good. It's not that there are no borders, but they're more permeable than we've been taught they're supposed to be. Which is also why diaphany feels like drugs, and why it's something that feels like death.

So I'm trying to get close to and be comfortable with this idea, this physicality. The minute after my grandmother died I put my fingertips—I was alone with her when she died—I put my fingertips on her breastbone. And because her heart was perfectly still, the way it never is when somebody dies in film or on stage, I could actually feel my own pulse very clearly in my fingertips and thinking about this curtain image, I realized that this is exactly how a theatrical scrim works. Because there was no electricity coming through her, this scrim that was her breastbone became opaque and just reflected me back.

I had the idea as a child that the sky was a ceiling and I truly didn't get why airplanes weren't bumping into it. I thought God was behind it, like a store manager behind one-way glass. Shelley, in his elegy for John Keats, says, “Life, like a dome of many-colored glass, / Stains the white radiance of Eternity, / Until Death tramples it to fragments.” Isn't that beautiful—I know it by heart because somewhere I have a tape of Mick Jagger reading it to a concert crowd as an elegy for Brian Jones. My grandfather used to recite something driving down country roads at night and I don't know if it's Shakespeare or Omar Khayyam, and I can't remember it exactly, either. But it would be a starry night, and the horizon would be sweeping out in a semicircle all around and he would murmur to us, “This inverted bowl we call the sky, whereunder” something-something “we live and breathe.” I like the moment at the end of the movie “The Truman Show,” when Truman tries to sail away from his TV existence and runs aground on the horizon like a pre-Copernican explorer, and the prow of his boat rips a hole right through the painted wall of the sky. If you add all these scattered pictures together, maybe the reason why my image of the undulating curtain is enticing is that implicit behind the curtain is just sky, total boundlessness, but the curtain makes a little screen between you and it, a veil, because boundlessness is hard to take otherwise.



Molly Benjamin: One of the things I've thought about a lot is space travel, which didn't exist before our generation. I feel

like as a culture, a community of Americans, we've been kind of ripped off from this fantastic stuff that's going on. When the first astronauts splashed down in the Atlantic, we all got out of school and went home to watch it on TV. The first thing that happened was the officials grabbed the guys and took them to Houston or wherever and debriefed them. I kept waiting and waiting for these guys to talk to us about what they had seen, which of course they were not allowed to do. So one of the first astronauts, I think it was Buzz Aldrin—when he splashed down he had grown a beard in space, which was part of our common culture anyway, people growing hair. He goes up in space, and it transforms his life, and one of his responses was to not cut his hair or shave his beard. He managed to say that to the TV camera before he got pushed away to the debriefing chamber, and of course when he came out, he was all Mr. Corporate again. You heard little tidbits about what these guys did afterwards and it was amazing stuff. One of them grew some kind of bug that eats the bugs in your garden. They did really wiggly things, so you know it was transforming. And yet to this day we have gotten to hear squat. Not even from John Glenn, who's got easy access. I suspect that that kind of thing is best told right away. I have a daughter and I could really talk about childbirth for the first year, but then it started fading. Every amazing experience fades—good or bad. Pain or happiness just goes away, kind of feels like you read about it once.

Once I went to the Cape Canaveral Museum, which turned into an enormous hassle—lots of driving, zillions of people. I'm thinking it's going to be space art—you know those fantastic pictures of the rings around Saturn, Hubble up there. Well there's not one bit of art, pictures, nothing. It's a nuts and bolts type of museum—it's all hardware! That's what it is and it ain't worth going to. And that's why they ought to put me in charge—or anyone in this room—of making the space museum. Where are those pictures? Challenger goes up—that was one of the most magnificent shared public tragedies. We all saw it, at least the replay, every schoolchild in America. Today we all remember Christa McAuliffe, but who were the other guys? And I swear the media spends more time on Princess Di and John John Kennedy than it did on the Challenger. And I would love to hear about the rocket that has a lady captain, which I think is cool. I also thought it was cool the first time I ran into a lady Coast Guard captain, so I'm easily impressed that way. I wished they would just sit down and babble at us. "Oh my god did you see that?" I'm sure that's the kind of thing that comes out of their mouth in those little rooms in Houston. So that's my rap tonight. The sky's the limit. We're playing around in space, and we're paying for it, the taxpayers. But we never get to hear about it, we never see the pictures.



Helen Miranda Wilson: I work from observation, and I've been painting skies since I was in my twenties. I'm a lot older now, so I've

been doing it for a long time. Skies are two things for me. One is, it is always there. Two is, that even in the middle of a pure-blue afternoon with no clouds and very little observable change, even on a day like that, it always changes. I have to stay open to that to paint.

One day I was giving a presentation about my work to my students in the most abysmal basement classroom. Why do we spend money on those rocketships when a lot of students in this country don't even have beautiful rooms to study in? I think a lot of people feel that sky is like vacation; it's something you visit and project on. But it's not. It's what we're breathing into our bodies—all of us in this room. So I said something like this to the students, who had just seen a lot of projections of clouds at all different times of day, and I realized they were looking at these like you look at advertisements—as icons for what's out there and what you can't control, and not what's real to us.

How many people besides people who fish—and they even listen to the weather box and figure they've got it covered with the gizmos—pay attention to what's going on outdoors? What's really difficult for people is what they cannot pin down and control. I like what Frances said because I realize that physiologically the only thing you can look at as far as you can see, is the sky on a blue day. The clouds look like they're solid but they're not, they're gas. What you can see is contiguous with your body in a way that water isn't, because water you can control, while air goes into us and out of us all the time. And it's really frightening to think about that. In the '70s I would have given a feminist analysis and said that men want to make it controllable, make it substantial. Now I don't do that; now I think we're all accomplices.

That Johnnie Ray music came to me on a little white radio in Wellfleet in the '50s when I was very young. It came from Boston and the reception was poor, so I could hear the friction of all that air. I can't believe you played that song. I get such a flashback.



John Kelly: In case you're wondering why I'm dressed this way—I'm doing my Joni Mitchell show over at Tropical Joe's, where the palm trees

are. I'm kind of vacillating between being dressed like Joni, but not feeling like acting like Joni. Because when I do, my voice goes up higher and I act pretty dumb and I sing pretty songs for you and I don't feel like doing that so, um, I'm going to take this wig off. That was my plug for my show.

There was recently a panel discussion in town at which they spoke about the validity of drag performance and whether it's real theater. Some people were defending it and some were trying to keep it in a predictable place. At this point in my career I'm a performance artist. I make dance-theater pieces. The drag stuff is really only about five percent of what I do. The Joni piece has become like a cash cow in a way, for a denizen of the not-for-profit world, an attempt to pay off my credit card debt. The drag characters that I've chosen to portray have been the Mona Lisa,

Joni Mitchell, and Barquette, who is a transvestite trapeze artist from Round Rock Texas who became the rage of Paris in the 1920s. He was Josephine Baker's main rival. So my drag choices haven't been typical choices. In terms of the "Sky's the Limit"—when I first started doing the drag thing, it opened up this incredible vista to me. Anyway, I'm going to read an essay about that, "In Praise of Drag":

One of my earliest childhood memories is playing baseball with, and receiving boxing lessons from my dad. I think he wanted me to be able to fend for myself. While alone in the basement of our house I recall dancing around to an old 78 rpm recording of Jane Powell singing "The Italian Street Song." My early years were informed by this conflict: my responsibility to the "outer world"—sports, school, peer pressure; and my allegiance to my own "inner world" of imagination, discovery, nuance. My shyness was not innate; it was acquired. Growing up in the typical American cultural vacuum called Jersey City, I felt my sensitivity risked annihilation, so an internal dialogue seemed imperative.

There were some flagrant but acceptable outward manifestations of this search for identity in a gender constricted world; they usually occurred on Halloween, which became even more important than Christmas. It was an event that could be planned, designed, and staged; I could be totally outrageous, publicly inhabiting other personae, even invading the colorful and infinitely more option-laden realm of the opposite sex. These early "drag" appearances fell under acceptable characterizations—old lady, gypsy. In one case I metaphorically merged these two natures, the male and the female, into an early artistic statement reminiscent of Picasso's bicycle seat and handle bar "deer head"—a football, sliced in half and connected with rope, became a brassiere.

Then, as now, manifestations of drag have never been the result of my desire to change my sex. I thoroughly appreciate what I was born with, and have never had a desire to part with it, or to augment it in a "best of both worlds" scenario. As a boy I encountered the strictly prescribed options for a "normal" life: play sports, go to war, become a hero, get married, raise kids, (or become a monk, my choice). My youthful explorations of the nature of gender provided a refreshing escape from a constrained, expectation-laden existence. They eventually became a potent vehicle for challenging behavioral assumptions and venting my rage and emotions, through art.

Out of high school, I embarked on a serious study of ballet and modern dance, and wound up doing a fair amount of performing. But a turbulent early retirement from the stage found me attending art school, studying drawing and painting. After I had completed my formal studies, I found myself living the life of the East Village bohemian artist, struggling financially, burning the candle, and rendering self-portraits while seated in front of a mirror. In a pretty confrontational manner I was attempting to record my inner world, and to express myself.

In 1979, while sketching the crowd at a club in New York called the Anvil, I witnessed a performer in punk drag, named Tanya Ransom, lip-synching to recordings of the East German Punk soprano

Nina Hagen. This was my David Bowie encounters Iggy Pop moment, and in a flash I realized the significance: an active format for exhibiting the glimpses I'd had of my inner realm, but now in an outwardly visual, kinetic and dramatic manner. I found in Tanya's punk drag an art that challenged traditional cross dressing conventions. I had discovered a potent, and socially annoying theatrical tool. In 1979 drag had not yet come out of the closet and gone mainstream and homogenized, clown-like, and full of excuses and watered-down innuendo. I had seen the possibility of drag as theater, drag as art.

I returned to performing and gave birth to my female alter-ego, Dagmar Onassis.

I moved from painting my likeness on canvas to painting the three-dimensional contours of my face and body. In this process of performing, an enormous reservoir of rage was vented, the closets were cleaned out, and I feverishly embraced drag as a potent form of expression.

I found I had a voice and proceeded to wield it as a prominent weapon in my theatrical arsenal. My renditions of mezzo soprano arias, black spirituals, and the music of Joni Mitchell—performed in either male, female, androgynous or historical drag—functioned as “audio” drag to the visual and kinetic counterpart. As I challenge myself I aimed to challenge my audience. I became addicted to this, to vibrating high. I came to regard singing as a challenging and vigorous way to publicly express my inner life. The constant task of the vocal artist to navigate freely between the chest register and the head or falsetto register, to negotiate the “break” in the voice, has existed for me both actually and metaphorically as a way to balance my “selves,” to reconcile the typically male with the traditionally female.

Drag in public spaces can turn any function into an event. The aroma of travesty is pungent, immediately discernible; it can transform a room and provide for a unique “frisson,” absurd and dangerous. It has also functioned for me as an effective “Fuck you.” While in Drag I have eaten in restaurants, taken a few “walks on the wild side,” perhaps gotten a first hand glimpse into how women might be treated by men, and played a trick on certain people—my youth and androgyny making for a successful illusion. But these forays into predictable drag turf eventually gave way to my desire to transcend issues of gender and to arrive at a kind of abstract beauty, an all-encompassing vehicle for expression, and a potent dramatic navigational option. The drag is a lure, a seduction of sorts, especially since most who encounter it feel that they know it, what its lifestyle and sexual implications are, and what sort of performance it will foster. Drag rarely seems to be equated with the promise of talent, though there have always been exceptional manifestations of the Drag Queen.

You drag you make a mark. Drag has never been about confusion, gender or otherwise, in my experience. It has always functioned as a sublimely specific vehicle for expression, a beautiful surprise, a red scarf waved in the face of a bullish society unwilling to witness the values between the black and the white.

EM: Thank you. I'm totally stunned by how many of the relationships between what people are talking about here have to do with conversations I've been having all week long. I feel like I'm in one big conversation. There's something about the art of the voice quivering and thinking about the astronauts and it seems some relationship to the female body, going into space and—should I try to complete this sentence? Anyway, I was wondering if anyone up here wants to cross-talk.

FR: I guess the thing that resonates most to me, John, is the way you talked about getting across the split in your voice and making it seem natural as a performer to be able to get back and forth across that divide, making it seem deliberate. It seems we've all been talking about some sort of divide. Helen talking about her art class, the sky and the basement; having travel to space, but then not getting to hear about it in the press; and my diaphanous panel and Johnnie Ray being trapped between Elvis and Sinatra. One of you said, “The sky is out there and the air is right here,” and that's interesting. At what point does it stop being air and become sky? And then when it's inside of you it becomes breath, and it's all the same thing.

EM: Especially that moment when it stopped on the chest in your piece. Which reminded me of when you have a mirror in your apartment and you take it away and you keep returning to that place for your reflection and it's gone. I think a still chest echoes that.

JP: I once heard that when you look at an ocean where the sky meets the water, the sky is sixty miles away.

HMW: Most of the time we've all been on earth we've known what it's like to look at the horizon, people who live near big water like the ocean or a great lake. Now they have all these machines to look at the sky. I come from about seven generations of astronomers. The first one was invited to Russia by the czar of that time, who built a primitive telescope. The urge to look deeper and farther has always been there and instruments have been invented around it. It's part of what we are. Animals, or bugs or plants, just take in the air and let it out and they don't have this conceptualization. Like Frances said, at what point does it become sky? It's all sky. It's just our concepts that make it not so. We want there to be something that's beyond us and outside of us and I think that's part of the reason we're not dealing with pollution.

EM: Jack told me that once when Elvis Presley was doing a big show in Las Vegas, Johnnie Ray was doing a little show in the back room of the

same club, and Elvis Presley said this cool thing, “Wait a second—there's a guy that I've learned so much from and he's in the little room.” And he brought the little room into the big room and shoved him up to the mike and said, “He started it.” Which I think is intriguing, but what I'm in love with is the relationship between the little room and the big room. Somehow there's this cultural accident where a guy gives a blow job in a small room and because of that he gets pulled out of the big room and put in the little room and then years pass and then some other guy in the big room brings the guy in the little room back into the big room. This is how it happens all the time if you know what I mean.

MB: When I was a teenager my friend and I and her father always played this game in which we tried to empirically prove that yesterday existed. And it was our conclusion that you cannot do it. We'd come up with millions of attempts—like taking a Polaroid of a fire. But really all you've got is what you've got—that Polaroid is the only thing that's real. Yesterday is not possible to empirically prove, and start weaving that in with space and fifty million light years. All you really know that exists is what's right at that second. As soon as you say, “second,” that's gone. I suspect that time is something that we don't quite get yet. We sort of understand speed. You see lightning and then you hear the thunder, so there's the speed of light and the speed of sound. I don't even understand the international dateline.

EM: I have one story to tell. When I was a kid more than anything in the world I wanted to be an astronaut, that was just like my one desire. I was watching *Wonderful World of Walt Disney* one night, a space travel show, and I was sitting there with my family and this rocket took off and I just had one of those feelings, like—this is it, this is my life, this is all I want to do. And I began to make plans then and I kept it up until the end of high school. I thought, well, I'll study geology and that will get me on the ship and I kept changing my mind about what study would get me on the ship. And this went on and on until college when I wasn't good in math and I ended up an English major and wound up being a poet. At some point in my life in New York, I was just taking a lot of drugs and being a poet. I was taking speed all the time and I was taking acid and I thought, ‘Oh great, I'm an astronaut.’ So I had a speed doctor in Queens who I went to for eight years to get amphetamines. And I didn't want to be Eileen Myles with the speed doctor so my best friend growing up, my real sort of pseudo girlfriend, her name was Mary Collins. I took her last name so my speed name all through those drug addict years was Eileen Collins, and so when I looked at the paper the other day and I saw this woman named Eileen Collins got to go into space and get my job ... I thought, ‘This is all an illusion.’

This transcript was shortened to fit the limits of the page. A full version will be published elsewhere someday.

VIDEO STILL: RECESS VIDEO



CROWBAR

NICK FLYNN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACK PIERSON

Late November, caught unaware. I had never hauled the boat out of the water, I didn't have a plan. Which was why I was riding shotgun in the stranger's station wagon, his muffler grumbling, our exhaust stitching together the couple dozen streets that connect Bradford with Commercial, looking for a fisherman named Crowbar. Crowbar, I'd been told, still had a boat in the water, and I needed someone with a boat to help me get my boat out. I'd left town for a week or two, left a friend to keep an eye on things, to see if the waterline was sitting heavy, to row out every other day to check the pump. That would have been Richard—Richard, who swam out a few times the previous July at one a.m. to work off some excess energy, too shy to pull himself on board, holding onto the dinghy until he caught his breath or got too cold and headed shoreward. The next day he'd mention it, *I swam out to your boat last night*, and I'd say, *You should have come aboard*. In Provincetown from New York, escaping a heroin habit that had gotten out of hand, he was sick as a dog when we met. We worked at The Moors—as day-waiters/night-bus-boys, a “garbage job,” as Richard put it. He'd swim out after midnight when the bars closed, a waterproof plastic case from Marine Specialties dangling from his neck, a cigarette and a lighter dry inside it. He'd crawl into the skiff to shiver and smoke before swimming back. By August Richard was leaving cigarettes on board, and sometimes staying over. By November everyone else had fled, the town had emptied, and we were fast friends. Who else to ask to keep an eye on the boat?



This was 1985, the first summer I moored the boat in Provincetown, the boat I had been living on for the past two years. I spent that summer a quarter mile offshore, estranged from my longtime girlfriend, trying to dissipate some bad energy of my own. Provincetown was good for that—the so-called last resort, the end of the world, jumping off point to oblivion. Provincetown, it seemed, could absorb nearly anything, nearly anyone who couldn't fit in elsewhere, no such thing as too freaky, too lost, not here. By late November the police had already made their annual post-summer sweep through town, rounding up the most obvious drug-peddlers, the walking wreckage, the ones who had been flush all summer on tourist hungers, and now found themselves eating the profits, the product, spending all they had accumulated, nothing else coming in. *Summer's over*, the police murmured, *buy a bus ticket or check into jail*. By then the rental cops had all gone back to their universities, and the dragnet cast by the yearround force was full of holes: many slipped through, left to face a winter of graceless unemployment.

The boat was a 1939 Chris Craft—42' stem to stern, 12' beam, double-planked mahogany, twin-screw, yacht. Originally owned by a judge, christened *Catherine*, later bought by the owner of the boatyard where she was stored, in Humarock, Massachusetts. Out of the water eight years when we found her. My friend Phil and I had been looking for a big boat we could live aboard, having lived for a couple years on a 31' Trojan, which had begun to feel small. At that size the tables lower to become bunks, the cushions become mattresses. But nothing felt small about

the Chris Craft. Boarding her from the stern you first came upon the aft deck, which led through a child-sized door down three steps into the aft cabin. This cabin had a double berth, built-in drawers, a vanity with a mirror, six brass portholes. The head was built into the aft starboard corner, and in this closet we kept our chemical toilet. From this cabin three steps up led into the main cabin, the wheelhouse—six-foot ceiling, windows 360 degrees, sliding doors port and starboard, cork flooring, sized for a dance party. Beneath this floor, the bilge, where the water tanks were and where the engines would be, if we had the money or the inclination to reinstall engines. We rationalized that we were primarily looking for a place to live, not to drive, though perhaps in truth we lacked the wherewithal. Then forward three steps down to the galley, which we had renovated, removing a wall to the second head in order to accommodate more counter space, replacing the small stainless steel sink with an enormous salvaged one of enameled steel, linoleum on the floor. The built-in cabinets had leaded-glass fronts in a diamond pattern, and we reblacked the cast-iron three-burner propane-fed stove. A door from the galley led to the forward cabin, fitted out with two bunk beds and more built-in drawers, side portals and a larger portal above that gave access to the forward deck. Above and below the waterline nearly all the wood was mahogany—we imagined a small rainforest had been cleared to build her. The forward cabin ended at the bow, the sidewalls closer and closer as you went forward, the curve of the hull apparent here, the bow itself bullnosed, straight up and down, like the *Titanic*, meant to pound waves into submission.

Phil and I had bought her the year after my mother died. A faded jewel, nearly forgotten in that boatyard on the North River, the boatyard itself not readily accessible, tucked away, not visible from the street, the street not a main street, its sign overgrown with brambles. But we found it because it's what we did—cruise old boatyards in oversized cars, get high and talk about boats. My mother had died by her own hand that past December, just before Christmas, shot herself. Phil's died of cancer a few months later. Twenty-two, I had been at school, finishing an undergraduate degree, I came home to clean up, to deal with services, then went back to school. I had read that one shouldn't change one's life after a serious trauma, that one should go on with what one was doing, so I went back to school, signed up for classes that spring. A few months into it I found myself in the library, unable to comprehend a single word of the book open before me, the book I'd been staring at for over an hour. Slowly I became aware that it was upside-down in my hands, and shortly thereafter I knew it was time for me to leave. I dropped out, returned to Scituate, my hometown, and began getting the Trojan ready for the season. In August, we sold it, bought the Chris Craft, and I moved back onto land. Within a month, realizing how much work had to get done before the weather turned, I quit my job building greenhouses and began working full-time to pull her back into shape. It was an impossible project, far bigger than anything I was capable of, and perhaps exactly what

I needed—to throw myself into something greater than myself, a project into which I could pour all my bad energy, which I seemed to have in abundance just then. The boat was built in 1939, the same year my mother was born, and if I stood on the deck and looked north I could almost see the spot off Third Cliff where we'd scattered her ashes.

Every waking hour from September until December I spent in the boatyard, scrambling up and down ladders, punctuated by runs to the hardware store, to marine supply stores, to stores that specialized in fasteners. At some point before we came along someone had begun fiberglassing the cabin, and it made sense to finish the work. We needed a string of clear days in order for the wood to be dry enough to take the resin, and October's weather along the North River didn't always cooperate. As we poked at the wood we realized that in spots much of it was punky, needing to be replaced, which slowed things further. The entire hull wanted refastening and caulk, especially below the waterline. Buying the screws to do this was akin to buying drugs—we'd drive into Boston's South End, to Allied Nut and Bolt, and pass a hundred or two hundred dollars to a man behind bulletproof plexiglas in exchange for a couple tiny packages of silicone bronze screws, things of beauty that promised to last longer than all of us. As the days grew shorter we discovered a hole in the hull you could put your hand through, along the chine, that line where the freeboard meets the hull. Somehow in going over the boat we had missed it. The owners at the boatyard told us, without great optimism, what we could try. They lent us hydraulic jacks and we lined four of them up along the chine, using a plank to distribute the pressure, and slowly cranked until we could eyeball the line of the hull back into shape. Then came a couple hundred dollars worth of silicone bronze. Most days I'd find myself working alone, as Phil held onto his job, perhaps not as desperate to see her float again, perhaps not feeling quite so homeless. Eating oatmeal for breakfast, skipping lunch, smoking more and more pot, losing weight, I was determined to get her in the water before mid-December, the anniversary of my mother's death.

By early December she was ready. We put rollers under the cradle, inched the cradle onto a train track, the track leading down an incline to the lip of the river, a steel cable connecting the cradle to a pulley. Once at the water's edge we had an hour to wait for the tide to float her free. We knew that after eight years all the seams would weep for days, that she would have to be closely watched until the wood swelled, and already river water was finding its way into the bilge. But when dead high tide came there wasn't enough water to lift her, and we knew that tomorrow the tide would be a foot lower. We stood on the cradle trying to rock her, but she was too heavy, already too full of water. I noticed a nail sticking up from the cradle, pressed my sneaker into it, to bend it over, to make it safe, and instead drove it deep into

my heel. The steel cable was holding us tight, no more play, and as the tide began to recede the owner of the boatyard got an axe and cut it, and *Catherine* drifted free.

We lived for the next two winters moored to a dock in downtown Boston—plastic on the windows, electric blankets, a woodstove. This marina had been home to a small community of live-aboards for ten or fifteen years before we got there, and after the long months in the boatyard we found the neighborhood welcoming. The cold, though, presented a new range of problems, beyond our daily need to keep warm, namely the possibility of the channel freezing and crushing the hull. Our neighbors convinced us to hang tires from the gunnels, which in theory would break up the ice as it formed. In the summer we would sit on the back deck and watch tourists tossing a styrofoam bale of "tea" over and over again into the scuzzy water from the deck of *The Tea Party Ship*, which was moored just aft of us. We yelled a bleary "revolution" each time the tea splashed down. The tourists would have their pictures taken holding a fake bale, and occasionally the rope used to haul it back up would fray and give, and the soggy mass would float over to us. We ended up in court for a year with the people who rented us the slip, who decided, as the real estate market heated up, that they wanted us gone. They let us know this by shutting off our water and electricity, by random gunshots over our bows, by calling us out to fight in the night, by cutting us loose. One boat even mysteriously sank at the dock, a three-inch hole found cut through her hull. After a year in court we won the case, and then decided to leave, hiring a friend with a fishing boat to tow us to Provincetown.

That summer I lived on her alone, as Phil never wanted to live in Provincetown anyway, only to get the boat out of Boston. I got the job at The Moors, which only lasted that first summer, my history of coming in covered with seaweed and sand finally intolerable. For the next six summers the boat was moored in the harbor, just west of the Coast Guard pier. I was convinced that someone had to be on her constantly, daily, to keep her afloat—sometimes it was me and a friend, sometimes just me. At night, if the tide was low, you would have to drag the rowboat out over the flats, pants rolled up around your calves, shoes left on the dock. You didn't know what your feet were touching and you grew to not care, as this was the only way back. At high tide it was easy, the skiff would be floating above all the eel grass and tiny crabs and muck, you just had to step in and push off, aim the bow toward where you knew the boat waited, and pull at the oars. All the water we drank we carried out in ten-gallon plastic scuppers, filled from a hose on Captain Jack's Wharf. We tied our skiffs to a dock at the end of this wharf—although the wharf itself was private, the dock was designated public through some loophole. Even if this weren't the case, Bill

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Reese and Suzanne Dwyer, two good friends, ran Captain Jack's during those years, allowing us free passage, a place to stash our oars, an occasional shower. An ideal set-up, mostly. The list of friends who lived on the boat full or part-time over those years includes: Richard Booton, who rechristened her *Venal* (it was the '80s, after all); Neal Sugarman, playing his saxophone on the back deck, who rechristened her *Evol* (after the Sonic Youth album); Warren Leslie; Jessica LaMontagne; Theresa Kolish; LeeAnn Schumacher. Others, many others, came out and stayed for a night or two. Ray Nolin used to paint on the aft deck. Sharon Niesp came out one night and didn't leave for three days. Neal, the unofficial mayor of Provincetown for a several years running, brought Jack Pierson out a few times, and he took some photos. Marie Howe made it out the last summer *Catherine* was afloat. People still come up to me and say, *I remember you, you owned that boat, I was out there one night*, but I won't always remember them. I do remember, though, how on an August night, you could dive from the top deck and your body would be completely lit-up by phosphorescence, like an underwater superhero.

But this reminiscing begs the question—Why was I out there all those years, a quarter mile offshore, no telephone, no electricity, a propane stove, a radio powered by AA batteries, reluctantly coming to shore for the winter, making my way back to Boston or Europe or wherever, feeling that land itself was the temporary state? What was I passing through on my way to more water? I would look at the shoreline—all those houses, each window lit, families inside, whole lives unfolding, and I could convince myself that I wasn't a part of it, that the lives behind each window had nothing to do with my life. For me, being on the boat was supreme isolation, chosen isolation, holding myself apart from the world, which I only dimly understood anyway. Also, perhaps more significantly, I could sit on the aft deck and never be surprised by anything again, no phone would ever ring, no one would knock who I hadn't seen coming. In that most tenuous of situations I convinced myself I was in control of what mattered. That I could go to sleep any night and wake up having broken loose—a knot failed, the line frayed, the anchor dragged—that I could wake up and have drifted out of sight of land didn't worry me much. It actually made a twisted sense, seemed in line with my internal weather. When everything has proven to be tenuous one can either move toward permanence or move toward impermanence. The boat was sublimely impermanent. Some mornings the fog would be so thick that the boat existed only in a tight globe of clearing, beyond which all was foghorn and unknown. But I would not allow myself even the surprise of land nowhere in sight—I convinced myself it was welcome.

Let's just say it—I was depressed. Living on the boat was, in part, a form of, an acting out of, depression. For long stretches this boat was my only home. That this was a choice I made was clear, but why I made this choice was not. If I could keep the boat floating each year, what did that prove, what would it mean, if anything, about my

mother? That the boat was floating in molecules of her ashes, that she had been swallowed by fish, that every time I dove on the anchors I took her in my mouth? The boat was a cradle rocking me to sleep, the boat smelled of salt and mildew, the boat had been nearly forgotten and I had saved her, through sheer will, improbably. Each year it went in, what did that say—another year from the day she died, a clear path, across the water, all I had to do. It focused me, filled my mind, an obsession outside myself. I could walk the streets looking to the tops of the trees to measure the wind, I could know without looking the tide, I could dive on my anchors every other day and reset them in the sand, I could see the cabins needed paint and try to make more time. All of it filled my brain so I didn't have to think of her. Which is perhaps the function of obsession, and the ocean demands obsession, it's bigger than all of us, it cares nothing about our struggles, our lives. *The ocean is always looking for a way into your boat*, a Coast Guard pamphlet warns, and it is true. With other boaters you exchange stories of breachings and near-sinkings and total losses. You hear about storms and how they'd been fought or ridden out or succumbed to. I know one captain whose boat sprung a plank while being towed, and while jamming some towels into the breach his arm got pinned, so his hand passed clean through the hull, the ocean rushing in. He had to time the roll of the waves to pull it free. I know fishermen who rode out hurricanes with their bow to the storm, the wind sandblasting their eyes until all their blood vessels were broken.

And then there are those on land, who say, invariably, *I've always dreamed of living on a boat*, to which you nod, placing them on the list of those to tap next spring to help paint her. It could be a perfect day on Commercial Street but you'd just rowed through four-foot whitecaps, having taken a pounding all night. Your reality doesn't line up with anyone else's, which is also strangely comforting. How can you expect anyone to know what it is like? So the ocean becomes obsession and the boat the fetish object within that obsession, if a fetish can be understood as the material container in which to pour the emotional life. In other words, it was easier for me to be filled constantly with anxiety and nameless dread at the imminent sinking of my boat than to face directly that same dread I'd felt my whole life toward my mother. That my mother did sink beneath the surface only fueled my desperation to keep the ocean out of my boat. The boat survived both Hurricane Gloria, in 1986, and Hurricane Bob, in 1991. In both she was damaged, took on some water, sank beneath the waves for minutes at a time. During Gloria another boat, monstrously, jumped upon her and they struggled, beating each other, punching out portholes, but she never broke loose, never sank, when, sadly, many others did. I kept her alive, gave her eight more years in the water, where a wooden boat thrives. And if giving into fetish and obsession can have a triumphant end, perhaps mine did, blessed as I was to live precipitously inside her those years. Mainly, though, I believe now that the obsessive nature of the entire project acted to keep me alive, got me through to the next step, provided me with

something truly impossible to focus on, beyond my despair. Even so, by the end of it I was utterly lost.

Which brings us back to that first fall, to the station wagon weaving up and down desolate late-November streets. Though the boat weighed in at sixteen tons, I somehow underestimated how difficult it would be to haul her for the winter. Not only take her out, but find a home for her on land. In subsequent years I would know to haul her earlier, by the end of September at the latest, before the season of nor'easters and emptiness. I would know to enlist the help of friends, people who knew these waters, knew boats. But this first time I was green, naïve, dumb. I'd waited too long. I needed someone to tow my boat to shore, where a truck would meet her at the ramp, back a forked trailer around the hull and lift her into the air on hydraulic pads. The man who operated this trailer was named Steve, able to thread the beamiest boat down the narrowest street, between telephone pole and stray parked car. But I hadn't yet met Steve, or seen what he could do. I first needed to meet Crowbar, who perhaps owned the only boat still in the water so late in the season. I got his name from someone at the Old Colony, who swore he was due back any minute. After a fruitless hour this friend of Crowbar's offered that he might just know where he was hiding, if I wanted to take a drive. I had nothing to lose. I got in the station wagon, and we set out, slowly. We stopped at a house on Mechanic Street, and a couple other guys piled in. Someone had a joint, and we circled it silently. Then we stopped at Perry's, where it seemed clear I should buy beer for everyone, in exchange for this favor I was being offered. Crowbar wasn't at the next house we stopped at, or the next. The driver would pull up, tell us to watch the car, and disappear for what felt like a long time. Once he came out shaking his head, passed around some valium he'd acquired. The sun was low by now, the shadows cold and long. It seemed the car was moving slower and slower, and with each house we stopped at Crowbar was further and further away. At one a woman came out to the car and told us he just left, but we forgot to ask her where he was headed. While waiting outside a house on Nickerson some sort of argument broke out and the two guys in the back kicked open their doors and stormed off in different directions. It was dark by now, darkness falling suddenly that time of year, and I became aware that the car was parked, and I was alone in it, and I wasn't sure which house the driver had disappeared into this time, or how long he'd been gone. Dead-low tide, the boat still chained through the salty ink to the sand. Maybe I'd row out later, check the lines, the pump, maybe even spend one more night.

Nick Flynn, a longtime seasonal resident of Provincetown, was a second-year poetry fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center this past winter. His book, *Some Ether*, is reviewed in these pages. The above is excerpted from *Wrong Ocean*, an as yet unfinished memoir.



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Gone Hollywood: A Conversation with Dini Lamot, aka Musty Chiffon

KAREN FINLEY



KAREN AND DINI (NOTE HOLLYWOOD SIGN IN DISTANCE)

Last fall, Dini Lamot, aka Musty Chiffon, and Windle Davis, his partner, in life and in music, for twenty-five years, hosted one of the best P'town yard sales ever. Outside the Bradford Street home the two shared since 1991, intrepid shoppers with a taste for the baroque found feathered boas, dusty marionettes, and at least one dismembered mannequin. I picked up a ruffly floral-patterned 1950s apron and passed it along to Jenny Humphreys, who embroiders quirky recipes on these relics of housewifery and transforms them into art. My friend Karen adopted a rickety metal bench, weathered from its long residence on the house's sprawling roofdeck (the site of some of the best 4th of July parties ever), and placed it on her own deck, where the multicolored layers of paint continue to chip and whisk away with the breeze.

The occasion for the sale—Dini and Windle's imminent move to Los Angeles—made the whole affair feel bittersweet. Town was losing a performer of majestic talent, by my count the greatest drag artist around. (The first time I saw Musty perform, my emotions ranged from absurd elation to abashed grief, to a peculiar sense of lust—not for Musty, but for living hard and well.) The yard sale gave us the chance to hold onto pieces of a living legend, and for far less than auction-goers pay for, say, the pearl necklace once worn by the icon Musty honors in the anthem-esque, "I Wanna Be Jackie Onassis." That these objects lead happy new lives, infused with the spirit of their past owner, speaks to the everlasting effect of those whose presence is so resonant, they never really leave. And besides, Musty will be courted back for local encores this summer.

I asked Karen Finley, renowned performance artist and former *Provincetown Arts* cover subject, who also moved to Los Angeles last year, to talk with Dini about what spurred the migration, and anything else she wanted. So they did lunch, Hollywood-style, and here is the record.

—JENNIFER LIESE

KAREN FINLEY: So, we're here at Wolfgang Puck's, in Los Angeles. Just had some Pellegrino. It's gassy. But I don't like to say gassy. I like to say bubbly.

DINI LAMOT: In Italy they say, "With or without gas?" I say, "No gas."

KF: I like the bubbles. So, I'm just going to talk to you today as Dini, yourself. Though I think Musty is a part of you.

DL: Bubbling somewhere under my skin.

KF: We both recently moved to Los Angeles, and we both have, I think, some bitter feelings in leaving wherever we were, but also positive feelings about our new direction. What made you leave Provincetown?

DL: The opportunity to record again, to get back into the music business. P'town was good to me. But on the other hand, I almost felt retired. I was kind of thirsty to be alive again. Even though I was doing Musty on a pretty regular basis and touring out of Provincetown, it's a little isolated there. I thought, well, I'll give up peaceful, beautiful Provincetown for the city life. In Hollywood, I live right around the corner from Wolfgang Puck's and the

Sunset 5 Cinema, so I can walk to see a movie or buy a book.

KF: Do you feel like you accomplished everything you could in Provincetown? And what did you hope to accomplish there in the first place?

DL: I'd been going to P'town since I was fifteen. In the late '70s, I started my first band, Human Sexual Response. We achieved a small cult-level notoriety around the country and in Europe and it still gets me in doors today, the mention of that name. We broke up in 1982 and I started putting on shows at Spit, a popular Boston nightspot. I called it Cabaret Lamot and performed different characters. Then we moved to Key West and Windle and I put together a puppet theater troupe called the Other Glove Theater with Caleb Fullam, a famous puppeteer from Boston. We were touring New York, Key West, Provincetown—four months, four months, four months. After Key West we went to Vermont and renovated a farm that we sold. Windle and I had seen a house for sale in Provincetown ten years earlier, so we said let's go see if that house is still for sale and it was. We thought we would renovate it and sell it, but eventually I started performing again. That's when Musty arose.

KF: So Musty came out of Provincetown. You hadn't done drag as performance before?

DL: I had actually, all my life, but Musty came about when I was shopping at Razzle, a little underground shop in Provincetown, and I picked up an old dress that I was going to remake into an outfit for Lucille DeRosa—that's who I was before Musty. I picked up the gown, and I sniffed it. And it was musty chiffon. I said, "Oh my God—d—, that's my drag name!" And Windle goes, "Oh, I don't know, that's pretty gross." I said, "No, say it over and over in your head. It's a perfect drag name for me." I started go-go dancing as Musty Chiffon for a local promoter, Ryan Landry, who ran a discotheque. I'd written all these songs and said, "Why don't you let me perform a song?" And he said sure. And that's when Musty was born.

KF: Musty had to come to Hollywood because Musty needed to get bigger. She developed in Provincetown ...

DL: She developed all right!

KF: You're performing here constantly and you have your recording career. Drag is accepted as entertainment now, but you were doing it when it wasn't accepted in the outside world. Do you feel drag has changed since you first started?

DL: Well I never really pay attention to the outside world. I didn't consider myself a drag queen until I started, in the past fifteen years, performing out. I'd been dressing in drag since I was two. Every Sunday, my parents would drop me off at my cousins' house, and they'd put me in their communion gowns and parade me up and down the streets of Bangor, Maine. And I couldn't wait. I was so excited to go and get dressed up. Play time with my cousins. I owe it all to them really. I was probably two, three, four years old. I didn't dress in drag on my own until I was maybe eleven or twelve. I was a rock and roll maniac. I'd go to Zayre's in the Bangor Shopping Mall to buy records, dressed up in drag. I'd put on my mother's high heels, stuffed with toilet paper, one of her little outfits and a sweater. I always thought that if I wore a kerchief, people wouldn't be able to tell that I was really a boy. And they'd think, 'Oh, look at that little woman. Poor thing, look at how tiny she is.' And I would buy 45s, take them home, get out of drag and dance around the house to the Mamas and the Papas.

KF: Was that just for your own privacy or did you consider that performing?

DL: I saw it kind of as both. It wasn't so much performing as I was fooling people and entertaining at the same time. I knew I looked funny.

KF: When you moved to Provincetown, and you were first doing Musty, you must have felt more secure. I think that's one reason why I would go there—I would feel safety.

DL: Yeah, you do feel that safety because, well, because they have laws. That's all I'll say. You know, the definition of drag performer is labeled on me. People will always say, "What do I call you? Are you a drag queen? Are you a transvestite? Are you a cross-dresser?" I'm a performance artist. And my publicist put it perfectly the other day. One of the clubs said, "So, when's this drag

queen getting here anyway?" And he said, "She's not a drag queen. She's, *he's* a female character." That really describes Musty well, a female character, because I have many characters. Like when I went out in Provincetown as Puss, who some may remember as a big, beer-swilling, 350-pound bearded biker. I would barge my way into most of the bars in P'town. And they'd all grab me and say, "Ten dollars to get in please." And I'd say "F-that. I'm just here to have a big brew with my girlfriend." And I'd walk by them again and they'd grab me, "Sir, you're going to have to pay to get in." I'd go, "It's me, Musty." And they'd go, "Oh, goddamn you!" And I'd fool everyone in town. So I'm not just Musty, and I wouldn't really say I'm a drag queen. But I wouldn't be mad if you labeled me one.

KF: You're a performer, a professional. But, people look at drag queens as though there's some psychological distress going on. What was done to him or her?

DL: Right. What is this about drag queens? Oh the poor thing, she wants to be a woman. What'll she ever do. Another *tragic* drag queen—the drag queen is a poor, pitiful drug-addicted mess. Like we all are.

KF: How do you feel in coming to Hollywood having your persona accepted? Not as much as a straight woman or a straight man would be, but there's some place for you. You're looked at as a celebrity.

DL: Exactly, that's so strange. For instance, I went out with Windle. I had a job, the opening of a club I had to cover with the news team. The place was packed. One of the doormen goes, "Hey, Musty!" and they just parted the waves, and I went in. And Windle was like, "How do they know you?" I'm like, "Honey, I'm a celebrity." They all know Musty. Once you see her, you kind of don't forget her.

KF: Tell me about the record, the dance singles you're doing.

DL: People were always saying "Do a CD. Do a CD." But I didn't want 100,000 copies sitting in a closet. I wanted to have a backer, someone to pay for it. And I also wanted a real producer. Performing out here, I'd run into these guys called Man Made Multimedia, a news team that covers gay news. I started working for them on events like the Grammys. They'd put me on the runway as Musty, and I would interview all the rock stars.

KF: Who are some people you've interviewed?

DL: Oh God, Clint Black, Lisa Hartman, Howie from the Backstreet Boys, Faith Evans.

KF: Are you going to do the Academy Awards?

DL: I think they have me on the runway at the Academy Awards this year. So anyhow, I was working for them, doing a three-week run in Key West. This gentleman came up to me after a show and said, "Your voice is incredible. You

can sing any style song. I'd like to produce a record for you." So I took his card, left Key West, got out here to L.A., and the company said, "Musty, we've been talking about it for three weeks—we'd like to back a record for you." I said, "Great, I just met a producer named Bob Este." And they said, "What's he done?" I called him up and started listening to the list—"Last Dance," "It's Raining Men," "Take Me Home" for Cher, and Barbra Streisand's "Main Event." So I thought, "Wow, I'll never be able to afford you." He said, "Make me an offer." I did, and he accepted. So we've done a two-single project, Bob and I, with an album in the offing. We'll probably start recording in April, and it will be titled *Paisley for Brains*. The album will be less dance-oriented than the singles, more of a rock and roll album, which are my roots really.

KF: And you're touring all over the country.

DL: Just started dates in San Francisco. I'm here in L.A. at The Factory on Thursday, Drag Strip on Saturday, and then I head out to places like Fort Worth, Dallas, New Orleans, Atlanta, Orlando, Jacksonville, Miami. Then it turns out the midwest is phoning for Musty. So the tour looks like it may just continue through the year.

KF: What are you thinking you want to do with Musty in the future?

DL: At the end of April, after we've recorded, I plan to put together another show, like my cabaret show, but with a full band, a mini-orchestra, so to speak, run that for a while, and see what happens. If this all died off tomorrow, I wouldn't freak out because I've had a career before in the business. It's just kind of in my blood. I'm really quite satisfied. So if it doesn't work out with Musty, I'll just continue my life with Windle. We've been together twenty-five years, and we're really happy with just ourselves. We love traveling, we love renovating houses, and we love going to see concerts, so if we're going to see a concert or going to give one, it doesn't matter.

KF: Who are some of the Provincetown people coming through Hollywood to visit? I know Kathe Lizzo was just here.

DL: She's so great. Kathe was out because of her book. She's in *Lesbian Erotica 2000*, which is fantastic. Pearlene Dubois visited and performed at a sold-out Dragstrip 66. Lypsinka performed too, and Dave Kennedy just moved out from Wellfleet to work with former Monkee Michael Nesbit. Lorraine of Lorraine's took us to Mijares, her grandmother's restaurant in Pasadena for a six-hour lunch.

KF: Your apartment here still has many things from Provincetown. There is a peculiarity because you're in Hollywood, across the street from where Tim Burton lives, right by the Sunset Strip, but it's like being in your Provincetown house, all beautiful furniture and paintings.

DL: People would walk into our house in P'town and go, "Oh my God, it's just like being in Key West." So that kind of goes with us.

KF: What's the difference for you in living here? I like the lightness, the sense that you don't have to be so concerned about integrity or politics.

DL: Or anything. Tell me if I'm wrong, but I find L.A. very friendly.

KF: I find it friendly, and everything is accessible. And I like that I'm looked at just as an entertainer. All of my "problems" aren't looked at as problems.

DL: Tell me a little bit about what's going on for you. We're both kind of in the success boat. For some reason, we've had luck in the last year and it's brought us both here from our little towns.

KF: I think I went through a lot of personal losses this past year. That happens to people in their lives. I lost my mother, my marriage was over, then I lost the NEA case. I just felt that a geographic change would help, and it did. I feel much more connected on the inside. There's something about this place, I think, being much more interested in surface, and people not trying to pretend to be what they aren't, that I find to be relaxing for my internal world. I can isolate without guilt. I can go places or not go places. I find the interest in hair and nails and outside appearances relaxing. Whereas, I think on the East Coast, there is such a pretense of integrity. I just feel there's a falsehood. Plus what you brought up about retirement. There was a sense when I was living in Nyack, that you settle down, you have your home, your own place, and it's like ...

DL: Now what?

KF: Right, now what?

DL: Both of us, we're just born performers.

KF: Yes, and I like that. Now I don't feel like I'm retired. I felt at forty years old, I was surrounded by people who were more escaping ...

DL: Than creating.

KF: Than creating. I don't mind the madness of the urban. There's this sense that if it's an urban area, it's so bad.

DL: P'town's pretty conservative when you come down to it, compared to a lot of cities and towns I've lived in. I hope, I think, I will live there again at some point—when I'm much older or want to be more isolated, want more privacy. Then I'll find a little shack in the dunes or something, if I'm lucky. Actually, you can't get those shacks, can you?

KF: I never got those shacks. I hear that they're there. I don't know if I'd want a shack actually. You know, I'd get the shack in the dunes, and then I'd think, well, how am I going to get out of this shack?

DL: I owe P'town a lot. But I'm not trying to redeem anything I've said about Provincetown by saying that. To me Provincetown really is a sacred place. I even have Penobscot Indian roots. The move came just at the right time, really. Both of us, Windle and I, were feeling this. It was time. But P'town made Musty, it really did. The curl on my forehead is truly representative of the Cape. That's where we got the idea to put the curl on Musty. Yes, I'm a babe of the sands.

Karen Finley's latest performance piece is "Shut Up and Love Me."

INTO THE EYE WITH SEBASTIAN JUNGER

In a crowded Manhattan movie theater one January night, a trailer for *The Perfect Storm* booms out of the speakers. As people find their way in the dark and eat the glistening top layer of their popcorn, a wall of water fills the screen. The roar is deafening as a tiny boat makes its way up the impossibly steep face of a moving mountain. Sebastian Junger, author of the bestselling book on which this film is based, recalls the moment well. Shrinking down in his seat, he expected every head to swivel towards him. "It was painful. I felt like everyone in the theater knew it was me." If they had noticed his long, tanned face and five o'clock shadow, they might have said something like, "Hey, you're a lot shorter than I thought." It wouldn't matter that he was sitting down or that the photo they've likely seen—the one on his book jacket—only reveals him from the shoulders up. Because to the readers who have kept *The Perfect Storm* on bestseller lists for over three years, Junger is "supposed" to be taller. Strangers have told him so. In Europe he was described in articles as being six-foot-two, a generous five-inch addition to his actual stature. He's also supposed to be a salty dog, like the fishermen who crewed the *Andrea Gail*, the doomed swordfish boat at the center of Junger's book. Just as Stephen King's visage enhances the creepy quality of his horror novels, Junger's rugged image is a publicist's dream. He looks the part. Yet Junger is a reluctant archetype whose experience with fame has been less than comfortable. It has been, in fact, downright embarrassing.

As *The Perfect Storm* unexpectedly took off in 1997, the media came calling, wielding preconceived hooks. Reporters honed in on his looks and instinctively romanticized him, and Junger found himself fighting to control his image. "They wanted me to be a working-class guy. For one photo shoot they expected me to wear fishing gear and stand on a dock! What they didn't want was a kid who went to prep school and grew up in the suburbs." A far cry from the smell of fish, Junger was raised in a wealthy suburb of Boston and went to Concord Academy and Wesleyan University. He refused to pose in fishing gear, but one prominent magazine featured him shirtless and cradling a chainsaw, an allusion to his former career as a tree-cutter. In other publications, his eyes smolder and his muscles bulge. *People* magazine dubbed him one of the sexiest men alive, a tag he resisted, to no avail. "I told my agent I didn't want to do it. Then I learned the magazine didn't even need my consent." By that point, the media owned Junger's image. What he'd already given them was enough to run with, enough to make him a star.

With the movie coming out in June, the publicity machine is revving up again. After the book tour, which Junger describes as "a mostly miserable time," he reluctantly agreed to do a minimal amount of



THE SHATFORD FAMILY—L TO R: RICKY, ETHEL, RUSTY, BRIAN, AND MARY ANNE, WITH SEBASTIAN JUNGER

stumping for the film. On the Gloucester film set of *The Perfect Storm*, he and George Clooney (who plays Captain Billy Tyne) hung out and commiserated. They talked about how once you're a celebrity the public and the media think they own you, how it's not enough to just be yourself. Junger says he's learned the hard way that "It's not so much about creating an image, but about being on the offensive with who I really am." He cites a photo *Entertainment Weekly* ran of him, shirtless on a sailboat. "That's what you do on a hot summer day. The fucking photographer had his shirt off too!" But that shot, of an author out on a boat on a hot day, helped render him beefcake and started him down the path to the Oprah show, a place he did not want to be.

"I'm the person who asks the questions, like, 'How do you want to come across?'" explains Cathy Saypol, the publicist HarperCollins hired to help Junger navigate his own path. She is quick to point out that she is the kind of publicist who only deals with "serious non-fiction writers" and that Junger having a publicist is nothing like say, George Clooney having a publicist. For instance? "He [Junger] is very interested in international human rights, so I could help him lend his name to the causes he cares about." And what about that fateful shot of an exposed chest? Saypol says, "Hundreds of celebrities would have loved that picture, but someone who is private doesn't want that. From now on we're more careful."

Junger knows the double-edged sword of celebrity—along with fame, fortune, and opportunity come credibility questions. The doubters say that "serious" writers don't climb the bestseller list and stick there, nor do they appear on the Rosie O'Donnell Show. Serious writers have their work examined, not their peccs. "Christopher

Lehmann-Haupt doesn't give a shit about what I look like!" Junger growls, referring to an influential critic who gave him a favorable review.

What concerns Junger far more than the potential doubts and misconceptions of critics, fellow writers, even his readers, are the feelings of the fishermen, the people of Gloucester, the family and friends of the crew of the *Andrea Gail*. "I was terrified that people in Gloucester would think I'm the point and resent me for it," he confides. "If they felt betrayed or deceived it would be unforgivable ... I am painfully aware of what I'm not. The people in America may not know the difference but Gloucester knows the truth." In Gloucester, Massachusetts, where the real-life sea tale took place, locals are known to be wary of outsiders. Junger is well-liked but he worked hard for the community's trust. "I wasn't a fisherman, just a guy with a pad and pen. I think they accepted me at first because I came into the Crow's Nest [the fishermen's hangout] looking pretty scruffy after working outdoors all day. I fit in," he says with a hint of pride. In the Afterword to the latest paperback edition, he writes, "Every time I ventured into the Crow's Nest, I felt like an intruder, and I'd had several excruciating dreams about the *Andrea Gail*." Then, after publishing an article in *Outside* about the lost boat (the kernel of what would become *The Perfect Storm*) and obsessing over the response in Gloucester, he had an encouraging dream. "I was walking along a deserted beach and a figure strode towards me down the dunes. It was Bobby Shatford, and he walked up to me and stuck out his hand. 'So, you're Sebastian Junger,' he said. 'I've been wanting to meet you. I liked your article.'" In his dream, Junger, like a Crow's Nest regular, fit right in.

Junger's apartment is on Manhattan's Lower East Side, an immigrant neighborhood where the newest arrivals are exotic creatures like models and slick restaurateurs. The trappings of Junger's newfound fame and the wealth that accompany it are hard to find in his three-room walk-up. He lives simply—a CD player on an old box, a futon on the floor. He could use a maid. Yet there are small signs, like the crystal dish inscribed "1997 New York Magazine Award Winner." When asked about it, he smiles wryly and says, "Oh yeah, that's when I was named one of ten most important, or was it influential, New Yorkers." The dish is filled with shrapnel, hunks of petrified wood, and feathers, as if to bring it down to earth. Other personal effects reflect what he is most proud of. A framed black-and-white photo of an Afghani soldier, a Middle Eastern rug, a hulking piece of machinery dragged off the street, which now stands in the living room like a monument to hard labor. One indulgence is a beautiful black walnut desk, made by a friend. Junger surveys his possessions, wearing a plaid flannel shirt, faded jeans, and battered hiking boots, the beard on his face well

Junger brought their story to life by investing it with his own contradictions. Their lives are at once heroic and pathetic, beautiful and terrible; and everything he wrote was in service to them.

past five o'clock, and agrees that life is very good.

Before the *Storm* hit, Junger's happiest times were spent shimmying up a tree wearing a tool-laden belt. Living in Gloucester he worked as a tree-cutter to pay for travel to war-torn nations, like Bosnia and Afghanistan. Between dodging tanks and bullets, he hung out with other journalists, gathering information for articles he assigned to himself. Once home, he would try to sell the story, but the magazines he respected, like *Harper's* and *The New Yorker*, weren't biting. He decided he'd have to write a book to make a name for himself. His tree-cutting work gave him the idea to write about various "dangerous jobs." Around that time the winds were whipping the coast of Massachusetts and Junger remembers "standing on the docks watching 30-foot waves." Then there was word that a fishing vessel, the *Andrea Gail*, was lost at sea. Commercial fishing, he saw, was another dangerous job.

A common theme in Junger's work and life is a rebellion against safety, the kind of safety that keeps people at the same desk job year after year, returning to comfortable homes each night, cushioned from the elements and the unknown. In an interview in the *Boston Phoenix*, Junger says, "I grew up in the suburbs, I went to private school. You feel emasculated by that kind of background when you look at a man who has been in 50-foot seas and comes back with a weird look in his eyes." Now he says, "The experiences I most value in life are the risky ones. Experiences that get your heart pumping." In almost everything he writes, Junger does battle with that emasculating past. In a *New York Times* Op-Ed piece he asserts that we "make life appallingly safe" and in his book he warns, "Tourists blithely wander past machinery that could rip their summer homes right off their foundations." Also in the book, he writes admiringly, "Fishing's a

marginal business though and people don't succeed in it by being well-liked, they succeed by being tough." Junger consistently betrays a deep interest in, and affinity for, not just lives lived dangerously but working-class lives in general. "I am not at all interested in writing about people who are not working," he says, delineating the difference between sport fishermen, who he has refused to write about, and commercial fishermen, whose story he was compelled to tell.

Despite such predilections, he does not hail from, nor make his living in, a blue-collar world. He may look the part and even love the part, but knowing deeply that he is not the part significantly impacts his approach to writing about those he is "painfully aware" of not being. It seems that this bestselling sea tale, this rumored-to-be a \$140 million film, has its roots in a kind of class struggle. The class struggle as the inner struggle of an author who both loves and fears his subject for what it represents, or does not represent, in him. He wants to know where that weird look in a fisherman's eye comes from, yet worries that the desire itself, coming from a self-described upper-middle class well-educated guy, is a condescension. To keep this conflict in check, Junger resolutely curbs any instinct toward romanticizing his subjects.

In *The Perfect Storm*, Junger succeeds by mostly absenting himself. Training a clear, journalist's eye on the fishermen's lives, he lets the drama of their situation speak for itself. In the first few chapters he describes people not merely reluctant to go to work but fighting off nightmarish premonitions. They don't just drag their feet, they cling to bed frames and door jams. Every trip could be their last and they know it. So why do they do it? Here Junger's voice momentarily breaks through the narrative. Describing a particularly successful trip, he writes, "The lowest crew member made \$10,000 [per trip]. That's why people fish; that's why they spend ten months a year inside seventy feet of steel plate." As an alternative answer to the same question of motivation, Junger also quotes a fisherman's wife. "The men don't know anything else once they do it; they love it and it takes over and that's the bottom line. People get possessed with church or God and fishing's just another thing they're possessed with. It's something inside of them that nobody can take away and if they're not doin' it, they're not gonna be happy." In his book, Junger takes pains to write about people simply going to work. He lets another voice romanticize the experience. As he explains, "I had to answer the question of why they do it. But the question of why is an upper-class question, not one that these guys would ask of themselves. It's like if I asked myself at nineteen,

'Why do I go to college?'" Perhaps the act of asking why is not about class (the fisherman's wife asked why), but about being on the outside looking in; a perspective Junger is all too familiar with.

Early on in the genesis of *The Perfect Storm*, Junger experimented with fictionalizing the story of the *Andrea Gail*. "It was appalling," he says, "a total joke. I didn't have the right to. I couldn't invent characters talking, dinner conversations, et cetera. Maybe if I'd worked as a fisherman." He decided instead to stay as close to the truth as possible. In an interview with the Bee Book Club he says that journalists "are in a way working harder. I think they've realized that if they attend to the craft of writing while doing the job of reporting, it can be as compelling as a novel and lo and behold you're not even making anything up." When asked about the hint of disdain aimed at "making things up" he says, "Short stories are like a beautiful mirage. You can pursue that mirage for years but you can never get where you're trying to go with fiction." Junger wrote a lot of short stories but in his late twenties left it behind for journalism. It bothers him that "what you're trying to do as a short story writer betrays a class distinction, a special privileged status. There's that school of thought that plot doesn't matter. No son of a cop would ever feel that the plot doesn't matter." As a journalist, he had some revelations about the two forms. "When I'm stuck or experiencing writer's block now the only thing it means to me is that I haven't done enough research and reporting and that what I'm trying to make up with language is really a lack of plot. The words won't save you." Junger fervently believes that prose should be "completely subordinate" to the topic. He studied anthropology in college and considers himself a student of cultural relativism. "The less you interject your voice," he says, "strangely, the



GEORGE CLOONEY, MARK WAHLBERG, AND SEBASTIAN JUNGER ON THE SET OF *THE PERFECT STORM*. PHOTO: CLAUDETTE BARIUS ©2000 WARNER BROS.

more convincing you become ... I want to be the messenger between the world and the readers, like a waiter bringing food to a table." Fortunately for fans of *The Perfect Storm*, you can't always get what you want. Despite his somewhat reactionary views on fiction writing, in delivering the food to the table, Junger cannot help but bring his own dish; even the act of keeping his voice to a barely discernable whisper resonates in the work.

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So how does someone consumed with class issues deal with becoming a millionaire? What's it like at age thirty-seven to suddenly be flooded with greenbacks, to be the owner of a franchise called *The Perfect Storm*? Will he have to suffer through Happy Meals with toy fishermen, tiny nets, plastic fish and a Sebastian doll? Junger says, "In my position it is impossible not to feel a parasitic relationship with the town and the *Andrea Gail* guys." So he started The Perfect Storm Foundation. The Foundation gives grants for educational opportunities to the children of Gloucester's commercial fishermen and those working in the fishing industry. The kids write proposals for how they want to spend the money. One has already attended a boat-building school in Maine and another bought a computer for college. "There's a tremendous lack of opportunity for the kids of these families," says Junger, "If a fisherman dies his kids are better off [financially] than if he doesn't." On the homepage of the Foundation's web site there is a mission statement that reads in part, "While writing his international bestseller, *The Perfect Storm*, Sebastian Junger developed tremendous respect for the fishermen of Gloucester. With the success of the book, Sebastian wanted to give their children the kinds of opportunities he experienced growing up that made it possible for him to write *The Perfect Storm*." For all his discomfort with his background, Junger knows what it's worth.

Sebastian Junger's own story reads like the plucky (and lucky) tale of a frustrated writer who makes it big with his first book. He now writes for *The New Yorker* and *Harper's*, has *Vanity Fair* referring to him in a proprietary fashion as "our contributor," and is opening a bar in New York (his own Crow's Nest?) with another famous journalist. But Junger is foremost a writer who found the right story to tell, and the right way to tell it. His straightforward, journalistic style, coupled with an acute sensitivity to class distinctions, are what make this book a true homage to commercial fishermen. It's a kind of emotive journalism, light on literary flourish, but still expressing both a love and a fear of the ocean that the fishermen themselves undoubtedly experience. Junger brought their story to life by investing it with his own contradictions. Their lives are at once heroic and pathetic, beautiful and terrible; and everything he wrote was in service to them. Their story is more powerful than the storm.

When asked about plans for his next book, Junger gave a convoluted "no comment," revealing only that people will be "very surprised." A flush rose on his face, and there was, without a doubt, a weird look in his eyes.

Ivy McCropol is a writer and the fiction editor of Provincetown Arts. She lives in Brooklyn and North Truro.

Hans Hofmann

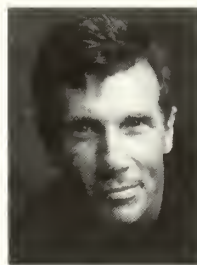
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Memoirs of the Provincetown Review, 1958-1968

Decades ago, on summer vacations from high school and college, I noticed brisk literary activity in the East End, a quick passing from house to house of people driven by inscrutable missions. I grew up next door to Danny Banko, a contributing writer to the *Provincetown Review*. He rented one of his apartments to Bill Ward, who, with Harriet Sohmers and others, edited the mysterious journal. Norman Mailer was already an icon when he became involved with the *Provincetown Review* in the early '60s. He was writing in a small

studio on the back of our family's property, passing daily to go to work, like a housepainter on his way to paint a house. No doubt his presence sanctioned the risky writing that aired in the fitful pages of a publication that served literature triumphantly for a full decade.

The following memoirs were commissioned after receiving a letter from Harriet Sohmers Zwerling. She had picked up a copy of the 1999 issue of *Provincetown Arts* last summer at the A & P, and wrote to say: "I was totally

astonished to find in the cultural history of Provincetown, my beloved summer home of 40 years, that the magazine *Provincetown Review*, with which I was associated in the '60s, and which was a truly important, radical, and innovative literary and artistic journal, has sunk below the historical waves and totally disappeared. We never were big and glossy, but we were the real P'town McCoy in the tradition of Mary Heaton Vorse, Hans Hofmann, and Eugene O'Neill!"

—CHRISTOPHER BUSA

BILL WARD

Surprisingly Unconventional Misadventures

We were in Kerala, South India, sitting around a jumble of stones that were being interpreted by an astrologer. We were three: Mary Ann, my companion, Claude Arpels, a jeweler, and myself. The seer offered a couple of facts from my past that astonished me. How could the astrologer—in a little village off the beaten path—have known these details? His last words advised me that I would one day edit a newspaper or magazine.

In 1958 Mary Ann and I were still together, living in Provincetown. In those days winter life in town was rather bleak and harsh with most of the shops, galleries, bars, and restaurants shuttered against the storms that swept down Bradford and Commercial Streets. This was a time when the artists, writers, and local fishermen met in the Old Colony, to drink whatever they could afford or on whomever could buy a round. Sometimes we would get together with everyone donating something to put into the pot. It's surprising what palatable dinners would spring into being.

Of course, employment was very scarce. That year I worked as a waiter, assisted a plumber and a carpenter, and finally got a job on a trawler as a cook and deckhand. If the catch was good, our friends ate fish that night.

Still, life was fun and healthy. Everyone got on, some to the point of trading off each other's partners. A close community living in a desolate, midwinter scene, can often produce the most surprisingly unconventional misadventures.

Among the writers was Danny Banko, a tall, lanky ex-cavalry man, who was a born raconteur. He would start a story in a somber, deadpan manner, pulling in his listeners until he finished with an unexpected ending that had everyone laughing helplessly. Paul Koch came onto the scene. He took life rather seriously. We three were the original creators of the *Provincetown Quarterly*.



L TO R. SOHMERS, UNKNOWN, WARD, KRIM, C. 1960, P'TOWN

Paul left the project before his name could be typed on the masthead, but we did publish some of his poetry. Our first issue was made up of contributions from resident artists and writers and from friends around the country. Interest in the project was slow to develop, but when it was finally understood that it was going to be a part of the scene, the artists responded generously. Franz Kline, who we drank with, Peter Busa, Fred Tasch, Mark Rothko, and many others, including Bill Barrell, all contributed to the magazine.

Bill and his wife, Irene Baker, lived upstairs from Mary Ann and me in Kiley Court. Many a time they opened their studio for magazine meetings that would turn into songfests and beer busts. Among the fishermen were Victor Alexander and Al Silva. Both were great Lotharios who bedded the female tourists with ease. They too participated in the birth of the magazine. In order to finance the venture, we asked friends to become patrons and pooled our personal money whenever possible. I made certain that the funds collected were safely banked so that no one of us could dip into it. Money was the ongoing pursuit for as long as we published.

Having collected our poetry and art, we were ready for the last step. We needed to find a printer within our price range. We finally found a linotypist shop in Providence, Rhode Island. When I first held a copy of the finished magazine, I felt as though the Indian prophecy had been fulfilled.

James Wingate Parr, an artist who lived in and loved P'town, created the fish design of our second cover in tribute to the fishing industry, bedrock of the community. He was a gentle person who drank with us. Later, he was mysteriously murdered in the dunes.

With this second issue, Danny Banko had fallen off the masthead to be replaced by a new staff. This was the issue that witnessed the local business community coming aboard with advertising support. Their belief in our venture made life easier.

In the third issue, Seymour Krim and Harriet Sohmers became associate editors. I first saw Harriet, sitting by herself at the bar in the OC. She was a tall woman with long black hair and a magnificent profile—not beautiful, but striking. When she left the bar, I followed her down the street to DeeDee Bloom's apartment. After she went in, I pounded on the door. Harriet asked Dee who the hell I was. She assured her that I was a friend. To simplify this history, Mary Ann had moved out, and Harriet moved in.

Come the fall of 1959, Harriet and I returned to New York City, still together. Seymour Krim was already an established writer. We tapped our contacts for manuscripts. Of course, we couldn't pay anything, but we managed to sail on for many more issues.

In 1960, in issue No. 3, we burst on the scene with a story by Hubert Selby, Jr., called "Tralala." The main character was a young prostitute who knocked over drunks and anyone she thought might have a wad of bills. She was a huntress on the prowl for a well-heeled dude. After many sordid adventures, she came to a violent end in a gang rape on the Brooklyn docks, her body torn like a piece of garbage left to rot on a pile of rags and empty beer cans.

In an *Esquire* article, the magazine was singled out as an outstanding example of the literary little magazine.

The following summer, I was arrested and jailed on a charge of "publication of obscene material for sale." A young tourist had bought a copy of the magazine in a restaurant, shown it to his parents, who found it to be objectionable and complained to the Provincetown Police. Chief Marshall brought charges against the magazine and myself, as Editor-in-Chief.

We were convicted at trial despite the expert testimony of an array of witnesses that included Pulitzer Prize winner for poetry, Stanley Kunitz, magazine editor and professor of literature, Norman Podhoretz, and publisher, Jason Epstein. All agreed that "Tralala" was in the "naturalistic tradition." If anything, the central character paid a

terrible price for her life of sadistic crime, making it a morality tale rather than a piece of pornography.

The dénouement of our legal drama was that the Massachusetts Attorney General agreed to a *nolle prosequi* on the entire proceeding, thus justifying our intrepid position.

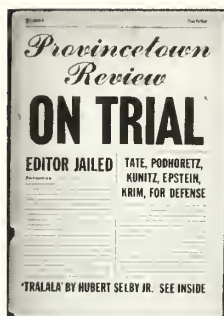
After *Provincetown Review* No. 3, our little magazine had arrived. We received manuscripts from around the country as well as an abundance of contributions from the New York scene. But money was still a concern.

To raise funds, we threw parties in lofts, dance studios, and halls around the city with live music by stars like David Amram and the painter Larry Rivers.

One way or another, we managed to put out four more issues, containing hot contemporary work by such important writers as Susan Sontag, Allen Ginsberg, Alfred Chester, LeRoi Jones, Jack Micheline and more. By 1968, we started to lose momentum. However, our last issue, No. 7, was a triumph.

The decade of publishing the magazine, from 1958 to 1968, was an exciting time in my life. Over thirty years later, the connections are still there. Unfortunately, Seymour and others have not survived to see this acknowledgment of a great, not so "little," magazine.

Bill Ward: Former editor of Provincetown Review, still teaching, traveling the world, looking for an explanation of being.



the writers were Norman Mailer, Seymour Krim, and Charles Olson. The list of patrons included such Provincetown natives as Albert Silva, Vic Alexander, Robert Patrick, and art community stalwarts like Fritz Bultman and Mark Rothko. The masthead lists me as Associate Editor, a courtesy title, gift of Bill Ward.

By summer 1960, the magazine had metamorphosed into *Provincetown Review*, with Seymour Krim and myself as Associate Editors. We gave that issue, No. 3, a totally new look and feel. Somewhere in Brooklyn we had found a brilliant Lithuanian printer, Balys Jacikevicius, who, as an artist himself, embraced our pages with eccentric typefaces and highly original layouts. We had begun to move away from a purely local focus and to expand into the New York literary scene.

We published LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), Paul Goodman, Rosalyn Drexler, Peter LaFarge, Fred McDarragh, Phillip Lamantia and most significantly, Hubert Selby, Jr., whose violently sensual story, "Tralala," would make our magazine a *cause célèbre* in the arena of artistic freedom.

No. 3 was our first baby—totally original in concept. It bonded the three of us, Bill, Seymour and myself, into an intense and somewhat incestuous family.

In issue No. 4, we drew on our respective friends and connections and brought to press under our covers such significant writers and artists as Alfred Chester, Allen Ginsberg, Joel Oppenheimer, Susan Sontag, Diane DiPrima, Selina Trieff, Emilio Cruz, and Elaine de Kooning.

Our mad Lithuanian had lost interest in our project, but we found, serendipitously, a new printer, a great old Lefty and art lover called Harry Gantt. We also had a talented Art Editor, Alf Zusi, and brilliant cover photography by Larry Shustak.

The storm broke that summer of 1961, based on a trumped-up charge of selling pornography to a minor—the Selby story, in No. 3, in 1960. Our response was *Provincetown Review* No. 5.

In it we published the entire transcript of the nasty trial in which Bill Ward, as Editor-in-Chief, was accused of pushing smut. With the help of our ACLU attorney, Reuben Goodman, we enlisted such important literary figures as Stanley Kunitz, Jason Epstein, Norman Podhoretz, and Allen Tate to speak in defense of our right to publish the story. Their testimonies, in particular that of Stanley Kunitz, Pulitzer Prize winner and established American poet, were deeply interesting and important in terms of the whole history of American literature.

I wrote an article in the *Village Voice* on the police-state atmosphere of our supposedly liberal town. I said, "Provincetown, beloved of Bohemia since the '20s, is well on its way to becoming the most repressive little city on the Eastern seaboard." And farther on, "The story ["Tralala"] was good, beautiful in the high tradition of didactic realist writing, the tradition of Zola, Flaubert, Farrell, Faulkner, the Marquis de Sade. We didn't want to

corrupt the minds of Boy Scouts or of the local Knights of Columbus."

In spite of the brilliant defense mounted by our lawyer, and of a giant hole in the prosecution's case (the buyer *had not been underage* at the time of purchase), the magazine, in the person of Bill Ward, was convicted. We appealed the verdict and the entire case was dismissed. Our (in)famous Police Chief, Francis H. Marshall, was outraged and protested the decision. But we had won.

The case had put *Provincetown Review* on the national map. Unfortunately, it had pretty much exhausted our little family emotionally and financially. But we were inspired by a righteous determination to keep the magazine going and brought out No. 6 in 1963, again with Harry Gantt as our printer.

In this issue, our connection to the Beat movement became evident. We published Herbert Huncke, Jack Micheline, Stanley Fisher, and our own strongly New York stuff—my story, "The End," Seymour's "Through a Kid's Fearful Eyes," and Bill's Introduction. Again, we had a smashing photographic cover by Ken Van Sickle and a section of graffiti shots by Larry Shustak. As from the beginning, we were out front, never looking back. The '60s zeitgeist was our natural home—we swam in it and ahead of it.

And then, things changed. Our lives changed. I married, had a son, and became a teacher. Bill also married. Our sweet Daddy, Seymour, was teaching abroad and producing his own fantastic books, like *Views of a Nearsighted Cannoneer* and *Shake It for the World, Smartass*. On our masthead he was listed as "Deus ex Machina" because of his necessarily diminished participation. We were still tight, all of us, but other demands took precedence.

No. 7 had a sensational photographic cover, showing two tittering New York cops in dark glasses. The banner across their portrait said, "The Last of Lenny Bruce," a signal to our readers of the issue's serious intent. We were targeting the whole country—its hypocrisy, its lack of honor, its violence. Bill Ward fired the opening shot with his poem, "RFK (June 8th, 1968)," a powerful indictment of our murderous society. Alfred Chester, Ted Joans, Carl Solomon, Troy De Bosc (his gay-themed story, "The Princess of Perry Street," ventured into an area of American life hardly touched before), Edward Field and Rosalyn Drexler wrote with an overwhelming seriousness and sharpness we had perhaps not achieved until then. And, of course, the UPI photograph of a naked Lenny Bruce, dead from a heroin overdose on the bathroom floor, was the bloody heart of the issue. Dan Propper's extraordinary poem about death accompanied and expanded on the photo—a powerful elegy.

That was our last issue. We went our separate ways—old friends and former lovers—who had, against tough odds, created a literary review to make ourselves and Provincetown proud.

Harriet Sohmers Zwerling: Former editor of Provincetown Review, mother of rock musician Milo Z, retired from teaching, writing up a storm, still swinging.

HARRIET SOHMERS ZWERLING

Old Friends and Former Lovers

In the spring of 1959, shipwrecked in New York, back from ten years in Paris, I washed up on the bay shore of Provincetown, broke and pregnant.

A few weeks later, having flown to Havana for an abortion, I shacked up with Bill Ward, then a year-round resident, waiter at the Lobster Pot, wild-eyed, wild-haired poet, and all-round swinger. The summer before, Bill and his long, lanky, hard-drinking friend, Danny Banko, had put out a magazine. It was called *Provincetown Quarterly* and, in an inspirational foreword, declared itself a voice for beauty and artistic freedom. That first issue had a contribution from Mary Heaton Vorse on the Provincetown Playhouse, and a poem by the famous Harry Kemp, "Poet of the Dunes," both icons of the early P'town art colony. Tony Vevers did the cover, and there was work by other artists who lived and worked in Provincetown.

By the next summer, when I arrived on the scene, the magazine had changed its name, presumably for practical purposes, to *Provincetown Annual*. It had a cover by James Wingate Parr, art by Hans Hofmann, Lenore Jaffe, Bill Barrell, Franz Kline and other Cape-connected artists. Among



CHERIE NUTTING, *I SAW MYSELF REFLECTED IN HIS EYES*, 1986

Are We Going to Fez?—Talking Paul Bowles with **Cherie Nutting**

STEPHEN AIKEN

Say: "O unbelievers,
I serve not what you serve
and you are not serving what I serve."

—*The Koran*

I am the wrong direction, the dead nerve-end, the unfinished scream. One day my words may comfort you, as yours can never comfort me."

—Paul Bowles, *Next to Nothing*

Cherie Nutting's East Village studio apartment opens to a narrow hallway. There is a modest darkroom on the left, and, stepping straight, a small bathroom. "The plumbing is leaking again," she informs me. The bathroom walls are saloned with mementos—Cherie in a Davy Crockett cap, looking like Scout in the movie *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Cherie in a ballerina tutu, Cherie's mother, standing *contraposto* in a white two-piece, the epitome of late-'50s glamour. There's a psychedelic painting of a knife and heart by Mohamed Mrabet, the Moroccan storyteller, and of course, pictures of Paul Bowles, which prove to be everywhere. Passing the niche kitchen, Cherie opens the refrigerator door. Inside, it looks like an igloo, with something snowed in that may be mayonnaise. I realize I should have brought some take-out with the bag of beer. Our shoes left at the door, we settle down on big Moroccan pillows. My only concern is the sweltering heat. "How is it a numbing sixteen degrees outside and blood temperature in here?" I ask. "You could open the window," she offers, "but the gates are broken. Just pretend you're in the desert!"

It is the frantic week before *Yesterday's Perfume* goes to the printer. Cherie's book chronicles, in photographs and diaristic writing, the thirteen years she spent with Paul Bowles in Morocco. Having just returned from the office of her editor at Random House, Roy Finamore, she is contemplating the economic demands of the publishing industry and how her project resists standardization. Its 264 pages include contributions from Peter Beard and Bruce Weber, and

previously unpublished writings by Bowles. She is sorting paste-ups. It's a "This is going in, this is coming out, what do you think of this?" kind of conversation. I'm boggled, but form some idea of the overall picture. The great achievement of *Yesterday's Perfume* will be its presenting of Bowles, who died in November of 1999, in a new light. Because Bowles chose to remain abroad in his modest Tangier apartment for over fifty years, he is often perceived in this country as standoffish and taciturn. Nutting presents Bowles as a warm and upbeat personality surrounded by a circle of talented friends. Call him the "last existentialist" if you must, as long as that assessment does not preclude having fun.

I've known Cherie for over twenty years. When we first met we learned we had Morocco in common. I had traveled in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, yet an important ingredient was missing in my North African experience. I had yet to read "the book." It wasn't until Cherie gave me the book and I read it that I was, shall I say, initiated. The book was Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky*. Out of print for years, the post-World War II novel was being rediscovered by a cadre of readers at the beginning of the post-Vietnam era. It tapped that same spirit-weary nerve in a new generation looking for anywhere that was not *here*. Anywhere or better yet, nowhere, to shed their Americanness, like the skin of a snake let roll down a desert dune. Bowles derived his title from a popular World War I tune, "Down Among the Sheltering Palms." Because in the Sahara there is only the sky, Bowles omitted the palms, leaving the fine fabric of the sky. Bowles presented the new conditions of modernity, ground rules for the infidel: The sky is the thin membrane between life and death, the traveler's final frontier, and the last obstacle to repose. Those who retreat to the oases of this alien world learned that becoming one with the other is impossible. All that is left to the living is madness or flight. En route to Ceylon, shortly after reading reviews of *The Sheltering Sky*, Bowles stopped in Djibouti and photographed the enamel sign that marked the residence of the great 19th-century poet-traveler, Arthur Rimbaud. Bowles' novel certainly heeded Rimbaud's marvelous revolutionary cry: "Il faut être absolument moderne." (We have to be absolutely modern.)

STEPHEN AIKEN: You first visited Morocco as a child.

CHERIE NUTTING: Yes. My mother and I sailed on the *SS Constitution* in 1960. Oddly enough, I was to learn that Jane Bowles would make the crossing on the same ship one month later. We were on our way to Spain, however our first port of call was Casablanca. At the captain's suggestion, we took a bus to Rabat. My mother was now accompanied by a German Count, who was loving looking at her. She was tall and gorgeous. In the Casbah, all eyes were on my mother's blonde hair. At the time I thought that Morocco was in the desert, but of course the Moroccan coast is far from the Sahara. So when the bus passed a spot that looked like the desert, I took a photograph of the landscape, which I later called "The False Desert." That was my first brief experience of Morocco, land of illusions. I always kept this little snapshot with me, thinking that one day I would return.

SA: You went on to Spain?

CN: For a few years we lived in Spain, mostly in Barcelona, where I attended the Marymount International School. I returned to Spain in 1970 and found it a very different place. Franco was still hanging on, but much of the unique flavor of the country had faded. These were the hippie days. I was traveling with my girlfriend, Stacey, and we decided to go south and take the ferry across the Straits of Gibraltar to Tangier.

SA: Two young American women alone in the Casbah.

CN: Oh yes, the hustlers were all over us. Stacey wanted to leave the next day, but I convinced her to stay. We traveled south to Essouira. One night we got high and Stacey began talking about wanting to get married and settle down. I was absolutely against this idea. I said, "No!" she should stay with me in Morocco. Well, we left for Marrakesh and there at the American Express office, I met a guy named Meko and we were married practically the next day.

SA: American Express—I should say so! I thought we were on the Marrakesh Express.

CN: Later we opened a store in Provincetown called Marrakesh Imports.

SA: When did you become aware of Paul Bowles?

CN: Toward the end of our marriage, my ex-husband gave me a copy of *The Sheltering Sky*. "This book was written for you," he said, and he was right. It had an enormous impact on me.

SA: And shortly after, you got the notion to write to Bowles?

CN: Yes, I was having these dreams with strange images of birds swooping and smashing into my head. A short time after this, a good friend, Al DiLauro, died. It was such a shock. He was older than me, but so young at heart. I thought the dreams were a warning.

SA: Al DiLauro, the artist from New York and Provincetown. He did that wonderful series of landscape collages, each with an artificial daffodil placed in the scene.

CN: They had artificial daffodils at his funeral, and I saved two. He loved daffodils because they heralded spring and his return to Provincetown.

SA: In this letter to Paul Bowles, did you write about the dream?

CN: It was the story of my life—in about ten pages. I sent two photos with it. One was of my masculine side, which I called "Scout," I look like an Indian with a headdress. The other was of my feminine side, which I called "Alma," sitting next to my altar in a negligee. I told him it was in my destiny that we should meet!

SA: A ten-page letter from a stranger, and he wrote you back?

CN: Yes. I never expected it. He even invited me to visit him in Tangier.

SA: So you started packing?

CN: Yeah, I went via Spain, stopping in Malaga to pay tribute to Jane Bowles. She is buried in the Cemetery San Miguel. In my hand I carried Al's artificial daffodil to place on her grave. I took away a film canister of earth and a bouquet of white, plastic forget-me-nots as gifts for Paul.

SA: In Tangier you had some difficulty locating Bowles' apartment.

CN: Yes, Paul's directions were vague, and the taxi driver was of little help and left me in what looked like the middle of nowhere. I was lost, and it was starting to rain. Then I saw it—the 1966 golden Mustang that I had read about in Jay McInerney's article on Paul in *Vanity Fair*.

SA: He did like to travel in style.

CN: And never lightly, always ten or twelve valises. He like to have lots of things to wear, I guess.

SA: He wasn't exactly trying to blend in.

CN: No, in the '50s, he would arrive in little desert towns with his driver, Tamsamany, dressed in a cap and chauffeur's outfit. He owned a Jaguar then.

SA: Back to your first meeting. I've read Bowles' description of his apartment in the Immuebe Itesa as being "visually neutral."

CN: Well it was visually dark, there were no lights in the hallways. When I found the bell and rang it, there was no sound. Just when I knocked, the door pulled open onto a chain-lock, and there was Paul peering out. I said, "I am Cherie Nutting," and the door slammed shut. He was just unlatching the chain—he did let me in.

SA: Did you have your camera?

CN: Of course, I flashed a picture the moment the door opened! His first vision of me was with a camera in front of my face.

SA: Eventually you spent some time living in the same building.

CN: Yes, I lived below him in Jane Bowles' old apartment, number 15. He was above me in number 20. It was nice. We could knock to say goodnight to each other. I would go bang, bang and he would go bang, bang, bang.

SA: It sounds like the Count of Monte Cristo. What about his hypersensitivity to sound?

CN: He had a very particular sleeping arrangement. He liked the head of his bed to face north. He wore a mask and ear plugs and locked himself in his room. And then there was this machine he had constructed beside his bed. It was a fan precariously balanced with a coat hanger and a piece of string linked to a *taifor*, which is a low, metal Moroccan table.

SA: I like this, it's very Duchampian. Tell me more.

CN: Once I touched it by mistake, and he almost had a heart attack, telling me that it was all placed so that the sound was the exact same frequency as the dogs that howled all night in the street. If it moved even slightly the frequency would change.

SA: Bowles said he thought of his childhood self as a "registering consciousness." He fantasized that there was an audience behind his eyes, much like in a theater. He constructed elaborate imaginary diaries in code, and a little later, practiced the surrealistic method of automatic writing. He seemed to be looking for a way to describe the world from outside of himself.

CN: What you're talking about was very evident in his relationship with Mrabet.

SA: Bowles translated Mrabet's tales from Darija Arabic, the unwritten language spoken in Morocco, and brought them to publication.

CN: Mrabet and Bowles also had a language of their own invention. They conversed in symbols. Mrabet's everyday speech had an abstract quality. He spoke in parables. Paul loved Mrabet's concept of the world as a dual reality. Moroccans can be very direct, but more often they speak in a contradictory, circular fashion. Paul uses that funny quote in his book, *The Spider's House*.

SA: I have it right here, an old Moroccan saying:

You tell me you are going to Fez.
Now if you say you are going to Fez
That means you are not going.
But I happen to know that you are going to Fez.
Why have you lied to me, you who are my friend?

CN: It was so much fun trying to decipher what those two were talking about. As an only child, I had my own secret club, so I knew a little bit about the business. I was president and sole member of the Golden Eagles. I had a cash box for the dues, but no one ever answered the roll call. I alone spoke the secret language.

SA: On two memorable occasions, you introduced me to Bowles in Morocco. One thing I found very interesting was the way he responded to the words one spoke, not always to their implied meaning. At no one's real expense, he seemed to be able to reflect casual speech back, and get a good laugh out of the absurdities inherent in the language.

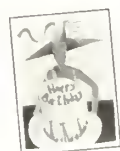


PAUL BOWLES AND CHERIE NUTTING, 1988 PHOTO: STEVE DIAMOND

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CN: Yes, here is an example. He was angry with me for something, and Paul rarely tells you directly when he's angry. He is subtle, so one has to look and listen closely. He's very hard to read. Well, I walked into the room one day and came right out with it. "Paul, are you mad at me?" "Mad?" he questioned, "Only dogs are mad, of course I'm not mad!" He was "angry," but we worked it out later.

SA: *Yesterday's Perfume* is difficult to classify. How would you explain it?

CN: Well, the first thing you have to understand is that the book is very personal and subjective. In this sense, it is not strictly about Paul Bowles. It's more of an autobiography of my relationship with Paul. With photography, with text, and other materials, I've recorded our responses to one another. It's a memoir of a time and a place, a time and a place that is already racing away from me. When I first met Paul, he was elderly, but still seemed fairly young, and I was a young woman. Now I'm a middle-aged woman, and Paul is gone. Simply put, we went through some of life's changes together.

SA: In one portrait from the book, we can see in Bowles' eyes twin images of you, the photographer, bent over your tripod, looking through the lens at us, or, more appropriately, at Bowles. We are somehow sandwiched in an instant between you two. Possession and the transmutation of identities are relevant themes in Bowles' writing. How would you describe your relationship with Bowles?

CN: It was a love affair of the heart, and although we were physically very affectionate, it wasn't consummated in the sexual sense. Paul had been married and very devoted to his wife Jane. They were unique individuals in a special relationship. Paul, for one, hated to be labeled—gay, straight, or bisexual, there was no one quite like him. When Jane died, Paul said, "All the fun is over." Still, I think we had a little fun.

SA: Let's talk a little more about *The Sheltering Sky*. As Bowles tells it he drew from his experience with the drug *majom* in writing the death scene of his protagonist, Port Moresby. It is one of the most memorable scenes I have ever read. What exactly is *majom*?

CN: *Majom* is made from the female cannabis plant. It's mixed into a paste with honey and dates and eaten. It can be quite strong. Port, in *The Sheltering Sky*, dies from typhoid. Paul had typhoid years earlier, and with the memory of that experience and the *majom*, he worked out much of the death scene. But don't get the wrong idea, Paul wasn't much of a drug taker, nor was he a drinker. He smoked a bit of *kif* and that was all.

SA: In the late '80s, the celebrities were again turning up in Bowles' milieu. Bertolucci was in Tangier to film *The Sheltering Sky*, along with John Malkovich and Debra Winger. The Rolling Stones were back in town. It must have been very exciting. But the real star for me was your second husband, Bachir Attar.

CN: I met Bachir in Paul's apartment. He is the hereditary leader of the Master Musicians of Jajouka. Jajouka is an ancient music tradition with sources from pre-Islamic times. The Stones came to Morocco because of Bachir. They wanted to record a track with him for their album, "Steel Wheels." Bachir is a hero and a credit to his country, for he has saved his music and brought it to the Western world.

SA: I still have the album—*The Pipes of Pan*—that Brian Jones recorded with Bachir's father. You could make a case for it being the first album of the world music genre.

CN: That was made in 1969. Brian died shortly before the Stones released the record in 1970. Bachir and I re-released it in 1995. Paul had very little interest in rock music, yet Mick brought the BBC to his apartment to film an interview.

SA: Bowles made his last trip to the States in 1995.

CN: For the Jonathan Sheffer performance of his music with the Eos Orchestra.

SA: Yes, Bowles the composer. There was an "Evening with Paul Bowles" at the New School for Social Research. He was interviewed by the composer Phillip Ramey. They were a perfect team. The audience was awestruck with Bowles' sharp wit. Ramey had all the right cues. They worked the room like George Burns and Gracie Allen.

CN: That's what Paul loved about Phillip. Phillip was able to do that with people, draw them out. Paul can just sit and say nothing at times. He chose people like Phillip and Mrabet and me to create a commotion. He liked to be entertained by a scene, as long as he felt he wasn't involved, but of course, he always was.

SA: You last saw Paul in August 1999.

CN: Yes, he was fading. His body was falling apart, his eyesight, his hearing, yet his brain was perfectly sharp. We said a just-in-case goodbye, but I really thought I'd see him for his birthday on the 30th of December. I guess he didn't want to have anything to do with this new millennium. Abdelouahid, who looked after him for many years, said, "The last thing he wanted to hear before he died was the sound of the cicadas." So Abdelouahid went out with a recorder and taped their music for him.

SA: *Yesterday's Perfume* will be published in November 2000. What's next for you?

CN: Oh, now that my hero is dead! ... Nothing drastic I hope. I have no new dreams, nothing.

SA: Sounds like you've caught that existential bug.

CN: Actually, I've been living on the road for so long, the idea of settling into a comfortable studio with a darkroom sounds very attractive.

Stephen Aiken is an artist and director of '234' Gallery at Hannah in Wellfleet.

Caroline Crumpacker is a poet who lives in Manhattan. She is co-Poetry Editor of Fence magazine and Managing Director of the Poetry Society of America.

Eye Spy **Miami**

Saturday, January 22, 2000

Went to such Miami scenes tonight. It's high season now, like Provincetown in August.

First was the opening of a new "collection" of art. It's trendy among local collectors to buy a warehouse and convert it into an exhibition space—sometimes open to the public and sometimes not. Marty Margulies now joins the club, along with the Rubells and Mickey Wolfson, with his huge warehouse filled with a varied, exceptional and intelligently installed collection of sculpture and photography. I can't imagine all this stuff in piles around his house, but my friend Alyx assures me it was all really there. It must be great for him to see it all up with breathing room. The opening coincided with Art Miami weekend, the big and mostly boring brouhaha at the Miami Beach Convention Center. Tonight's event was lavishly catered, though unfortunately, I had eaten pasta at home first. Most of the crowd was wearing black, just like in Boston and New York, except that here the heels are high and the hair is BIG. A bit subdued scene, though.

The next event, in Little Havana, was just the opposite—an opening of a new experimental performance art center called Space 742. Outside, live Afro-Cuban percussion music, alternating with the synthesized improvisations of DJ LeSpam and his multi-turntable concoctions. It was a young, milling crowd. A vendor was selling used books, mainly plays for some unknown reason, and boxes of records. Inside, a poet named Adrian Castro gave an animated reading, reflecting his Cuban and Dominican roots. He bills himself as a "poet, performer, and interdisciplinary artist," and I can see why. His poems are physical, rhythmic, performed in English with lots of Spanish interwoven. His bio., after a list of the grants he's won and the places he's published, ends with this: "He is a member of Keith Antar Mason and Hittite Empire [theater collectives] ... also a practicing herbalist and Babalawo." Welcome to Miami.

Also heard Alyx's friend Gustavo Matamoros play. Gustavo is a composer. "As a composer, I'm exploring what are the functions of sound. I think of sound first, and don't worry too much about the relationships between sounds." Tonight he was playing the saw, accompanied by a dancer named Helena Thevenot. The room, walls painted black, was illuminated by dozens of red candles. There were red and white helium balloons hugging the ceiling, ribbons dangling, and red carnations strewn across the floor. Helena's skin was all painted white, and she wore a red dress with a black net crinoline underneath. As she danced, I couldn't stop worrying that she was going to set herself on fire. She performs a dance technique inspired by Japanese theater, called



GUSTAVO MATAMOROS PLAYS THE SAW UNDER SCULPTURE BY FRANK STELLA AT MIAMI MOCA PHOTO: NECEE REGIS

Butoh. Anyway, it was very tortured and in sloooooowww motion. I mainly enjoyed the saw. Gustavo gets these wonderful vibrating notes overlaid with short, staccato bursts. He plays it with a cello bow, the handle end between his legs, the metal end arched with his free hand. The sounds are incredibly resonant and moving as they hover in the air. The saw is from Switzerland and has "Stradivarius" inscribed on it with a picture of a fish. He says he bought the saw for the fish.

My favorite performance of the evening, after the saw, was the "Cartoon Guy" (my term). He used one of those old-fashioned classroom overhead projectors where you write on clear plastic sheets and it projects the writing on the wall. Anyway, while DJ LeSpam was doing his music thing, Cartoon Guy was drawing and projecting onto the building's exterior wall. He would draw some character with a marshmallow head, then go over the same image with a different color, then pull the images apart. Then put them back. Like a very rudimentary animation. They were funny and fast. His stamina and imagination were just flowing out of his head and hand and leaping onto the wall. Sometimes you would see the shadow of his hand and the pen projected too. It was very fresh and fun. All under the full moon. Sometimes I just love Miami.

Sunday, February 27, 2000

Yesterday was a whirlwind. Gustavo played the saw again at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami. He sat under this huge Frank Stella sculpture, designed like a swirling, linear bandshell. It's like Stella cut spiraling lines into a flat piece of paper and then pulled and twisted up from the center, to make a hollow space within. Like some gnome's house in a Grimm's fairy tale. But not scary. All white and shiny. Anyway, Gustavo was under this thing, and it seemed very appropriate.

This was part of the Museum's "Teen Day," and Miami artists were there with various participatory

projects. The energy around the place was tremendous. Michelle Weinberg, formerly of Provincetown and the Fine Arts Work Center, was showing kids how to draw on and alter slides—working on a tiny scale, then projecting the images large. Their work was inspiring. All the adult artists wandering by had to restrain themselves from pushing the kids aside and taking over. Outside, there were more tables and music and projects. Adalberto Delgado worked with piles of magazines and paper and ink and lacquer thinner, doing Xerox transfers à la Rauschenberg. And Robert Chambers led a huge project—building a remote-controlled robot. Teens performed dances within the spaces created by other Stella sculptures. It was the best use of Stella's corporate, oversized brooches that I've ever seen.

In the evening I headed over to the Miami Light Project's "Here & Now" performance. The MLP is a non-profit group that presents live performances by artists working in "innovative" spheres of music, dance, and theater. Last night featured a series of commissioned pieces by six artists. One was outstanding, two were really good, and three were either trite or unfathomable. Not such a bad proportion, actually.

My fave piece, "CHAIRMANORBIT," was by Raphael Roig. First, he slowly carried onto the stage, one by one, various orange-colored objects—an orb-shaped light on a cylindrical pedestal, a small, round transistor radio, a plastic lawn chair, and a tape recorder playing bird sounds. While placing the objects, he tells stories from his life, successfully interweaving the words and the props. In this twenty-minute piece he manages to talk about how he imagined God as a child, how his apartment fails every *feng shui* test (ultimately creating failure in his life), and how he is going to create a religion of one person, himself, based on the concept of "I don't know." Finally, he emerged with a large orange plastic chair designed by Eero Arnio in 1969. A flattened sphere with an indentation for sitting, it also rolls on its edge quite nicely, and can be spun like a top. The climax comes

when the lights go dark, then strobe, and we see him spinning around on the chair with arms outstretched, like a child flying. A gem.

Last, I made a late-evening pit stop at a still-hopping opening at the Art Center of South Florida on Lincoln Road. The Art Center offers studios for artists, exhibitions, and community arts education. The exhibition I went to, "Preludes," featured six artists recently juried into the program—again, a combination of competent, derivative, and inspired. But that's much the same everywhere, isn't it? The street-level gallery is on a lively pedestrian thoroughfare with galleries, shops, and alfresco dining drawing both tourists and residents. Every Saturday night, the Center artists, by requirement, keep open studios, while sometimes inebriated but mostly friendly tourists walk thought the hallways and gawk. It's a little too much like monkeys at the zoo for my taste, but it seems to work for a lot of people so I'm really not complaining.

March 2000 - Museum Madness

Cruised on up to Lake Worth in Guillermo's BMW last Saturday night. We were part of a long stream of cars heading north from Miami to the inaugural event of the new Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art.

It was quite a scene—a mix of Palm Beach elites and young south Florida trendies, all mingling over drinks and art. If the food was more Palm Beach than South Beach (pigs-in-a-blanket, mini-quiche), the art was distinctly cutting edge. The show, "Making Time: Considering Time as a Material in Contemporary Video and Film," curated by Amy Cappalazzo, who just left the directorship at the Rubell Family Collection, presents work from the '60s to the present by Nam June Paik, Andy Warhol, Diana Thater, Bruce Nauman, and about twenty-five others.

The space itself was a dynamic element. Designed by the New York-based LOT/EK architectural firm, it's more creative than any video installation I've ever seen. Downstairs were cocoon-like projection rooms lined with foam rubber walls and benches. Upstairs, a long, slanted, cushiony vinyl wall, with dangling earphones, encouraged viewers to lean and lounge while viewing a row of video monitors held by arm-like extensions on the opposite wall. It was so cushy, we couldn't pull our friend James away from *The Way Things Go*, Fischli/Weiss's thirty-minute Rube Goldberg-esque film of a one-event-leads-to-the-next contraption involving fire, gases, water, falling ladders, rolling tires, and other studio paraphernalia.

And who says Miami is snobs who won't cross the county line? The place was crawling with hip-eoisie, including big mucky-muck collectors (Don and Mira Rubell, Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz, Peter Menendez), museum directors (Diane Camber of the Bass Museum, Bonnie Clearwater from Miami's Museum of Contemporary Art), contemporary gallery owners (Genaro Ambrosino and Frederic Snitzer), and packs of artists. Still, I did overhear one stylish young man say to his friends, "I'm so far north I've got a nosebleed."

Back in the heart of downtown Miami, the Miami Art Museum (MAM, affectionately) sits on an elevated plaza along with the Public Library and the Historical Society. Kudos must go to Museum Director Suzanne Delahanty, who has absolutely transformed the place since her 1995 arrival. Formerly the Center for Fine Arts, mainly a venue for traveling shows run by the county government, MAM is now a private, non-profit collecting museum focusing on art from 1945 to the present. MAM is also a great supporter of education, the local art scene, and local artists, eight of whom will soon be commissioned to create on-site installations through December 2001. In the courtyard the museum hosts its popular "JAM at MAM" live music series on the third Thursday of each month. It's also where they put out a lavish spread at opening night soirées. One thing about MAM, they know how to throw a party.

Last night I went to the preview fête for "About Face: Andy Warhol Portraits." In addition to the expected iconic Pop images of Marilyn, Mao, and Jackie, there were many surprises. Like Georgia O'Keeffe in blue diamond dust on black Arches cover paper, and a small, gray and black acrylic silkscreen of "Liz as Cleopatra." A screening room ran a continuous film loop of three Warhol films—*Eat, Blow Job* and *Mario Banana*. And under a large, now famous Warhol quote, "In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes," a photographer snapped Polaroids of posing guests which were then mounted on the wall. I declined, not quite ready for my fifteen minutes right then. There's a Miami Beach artist who has solved the fifteen-minute dilemma, legally changing his name to "World Famous." Didn't see him last night; maybe he thought people would try to be him.

The place was packed with well over a thousand people, including the Miami City Mayor and a rep from the Attorney General's Office. It was, surprisingly, a well-tailored, beige-and-white fashion crowd. Though I did see one shiny black patent leather suit worn with knee-high boots, and that was on a guy. One woman sported a black cape, black feathered cap à la Geronimo, and rhinestone studded spiky heels. And I admit to wanting to steal one woman's Astroturf purse with tiny plastic pink roses. Live music in the courtyard was next to what can only be called a "food installation" designed by the Elan catering company's chef/owner David Schwandron. Pop Art was the theme, and the offerings included Tomato Soup Fondue, Chairman Mao Chicken Salad, and brightly dyed, hollow round bread loaves holding tasty, neon-colored dips.

I could go on and on but I have to stop somewhere. I'll be busy next month catching events at Miami's Experimental Music Festival, "Subtropics," and I hear that MoCA has a good show opening soon. So stop me on the street in Provincetown this summer if you want an update—I love to talk about Miami, my other home town.

Necce Regis is a visual artist whose recent obsessions include jet airplanes, writing, and learning how to ride a bicycle in open-toe spike heels. She divides her time between the Outer Cape, Boston, and Miami Beach.



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BAYSIDE BETSY'S 487-6566

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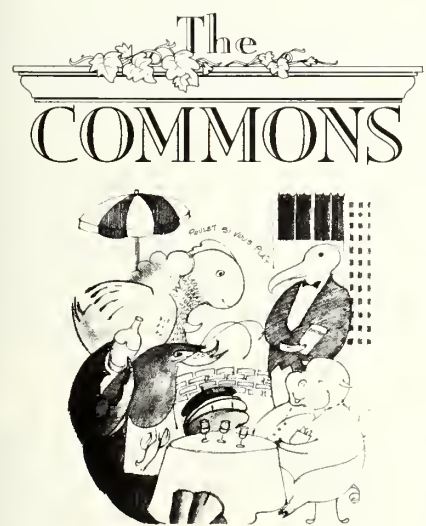
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Utopian Things Can Happen: An Interview with Maria Burks about the Highlands Center

JENNIFER LIESE

The former North Truro Air Force Station, the fledgling Highlands Center for the Arts and Environment, is currently nothing but a ghost town of decrepit barracks on cracked pavement. Built in the 1950s and '60s, the easternmost "early warning" facility for tracking incoming missiles and Soviet spy planes, the Station was demilitarized in 1984 and conveyed to the Cape Cod National Seashore in 1994. It employed 500 at its peak, and if all goes according to plan, as many artists, scientists, and students will commune here in the future. The transformation will be momentous, not only physically, but philosophically—a corpse of the Cold War reformed into a place born of creation, rather than destruction.

On a late-winter tour, the only sound is the intermittent whoosh of a civilian FAA radar dome. Broken-down camouflage trucks, dismantled lifeguard chairs, and rolls of rusty chainlink fence dot the landscape. The doors of the fifty-seven buildings here are stenciled: "KEEP OUT—OFF LIMITS," and upon defying such threats, one discovers they are not idle. Inside the living quarters are shards of glass and shreds of insulation, gaping holes in the walls, and a stench that, my tour guide informs me, emanates from mildew or dead animals and the excrement they left before their demise. In a room called the "Theater" (more likely the site of strategy sessions than skit nights), urinals, sinks, and water fountains are strung with tape marked, "do not use, secured and pickled." Inside a plant that once produced steam heat for the base, ancient turbine engines hang from the ceiling. Looking up, one risks tripping over stored boats, file cabinets, and stoves, or worse, falling into craters in the cement floor. The "Operations" bunker has two three-foot-thick walls divided by an airspace—shelter in case of nuclear blast.

Despite the overall gloom, one can imagine the lives once lived here. In what was the Non-Commissioned Officers Club, the high-ranked played bingo and drank 25-cent beers at a still-standing bar. In this room and many others there is the

cheery, albeit dated decor of wall-to-wall, patterned carpeting in vintage shades of brown, orange, and mustard. There is a two-lane bowling alley, a tennis court, a baseball diamond. The old commissary, converted into the North Atlantic Coastal Laboratory in 1997, is the first real sign of vitality to come. Here, Seashore employees assess pond samples and draw up topography maps of the Outer Cape. Come summer, Park Planner Lauren McKean says, visitors to the Center will lunch in a picnic grove while listening to volunteer storytellers.

This spring, I spoke with Maria Burks, Superintendent of the Cape Cod National Seashore, about how far the Highlands Center has come, and how far it has to go.

JENNIFER LIESE: When you signed on as Superintendent five years ago, did you have any idea you were about to embark on this enormous project?

MARIA BURKS: The former Superintendent had toured me around. We talked about negotiations for off-road vehicles, the relocation of the light-houses, and what the dickens to do with the North Truro Air Force Station, which had come into the hands of the Park just three months before. Interest in reuse had been growing over the years, and the minute I saw it I said, Hey, it's another Fort Mason Center—a former military base in California I had worked on converting. But you don't create a facility just because you have the buildings. You look at your Park's needs and decide whether there's some particular use that will help further your mission. Once we put the concept out, did site visits, had a couple of open houses, the public comment came



back overwhelmingly—if you can make an environmental education and arts center out of this, by all means do it.

JL: How will the Highlands Center fulfill the overall objectives of the National Park Service?

MB: Each Park is unique. The Seashore has a complicated mission with many less tangible aspects. We can pin down the oldest known structures, keep the archaeological sites sacred, but what about the distinctive pattern of human activity you're protecting? What is the human response to this place—how people get here, why they come here, if they come here, why they stay? What kinds of folkways and food products are associated with Cape Cod? You think of clams, you think of steamers, you think of poking around in a boat in the salt marshes. You're on the edge of the land, and it's constantly unraveling. How do we feel about that?

And then there's the arts tradition—vibrant communities with a longstanding relationship to this land. What does this Park do about those things now? Not much—a few modest programs. Yet, that's part of what made Cape Cod so special that in 1961, this land was set aside. You see a Hopper painting of a gas station, but the question is, what was Hopper doing with that little gas station vignette? He was capturing a feeling, an ambience, a sense of place. So how do you nurture and protect and preserve that? When we held focus groups, educators, artists, and scientists spoke to this need. It is very much our hope that the Highlands Center will be an expression of what matters most to Cape Codders about the Cape. This, I've become convinced, is what's meant by "the way of life" described by the legislative end of the National Park Service. This project is not just about a chunk of land.

JL: Most people, I think, perceive the National Park Service as a protector of the physical environment, rather than the more ambiguous qualities of life you're talking about. It's encouraging that the mission is so roomy, and that you're able to identify the arts as part of your overall mission so convincingly. When you pitch this project on a national level, do people get it?

MB: More than two-thirds of the units in the National Park system are historical or cultural. People often don't know that. So this concept wasn't foreign to the Park Service, and I have no trouble selling it. In fact the Highlands Center has done very well internally for acknowledgement, recognition, and endorsement. Just recently we received a grant

Utopian Things Have Happened: A Short Subjective Survey of Spectacular Arts Organizations Nationwide

With the Highlands Center still largely in the realm of fantasy, now is the time to dream big. The following profiles of four arts organizations are meant to beckon inspiration as the Seashore and the community imagine and cultivate the Center's future. —JL.

The Crucible, Berkeley, CA

A non-profit "educational collaboration between arts, industry, and community," the Crucible was founded in January 1999 by sculptor Michael Sturtz. Its 6,000 square-foot space will soon quadruple in size, as they take over a former framing shop and plastic factory next door. The Crucible boasts a vast curriculum in the industrial arts, including classes in foundry: welding, blacksmithing, glass casting, ceramics, silversmithing, and stone carving, and serves everyone from Silicon Valley magnates looking for creative outlet to youths seeking vocational training. Central to the Crucible's mission is changing the common perception that the arts are separate from everyday existence. The largely volunteer staff strives to bring creativity back to life and work by teaching applicable skills.

This focus on applied arts has made the Crucible a natural for attracting corporate support. Levi Strauss was an early benefactor, and a local company contributed a forklift so essential to the project it was given a name, "Mulligan." The Crucible also encourages

reuse of discarded industrial materials, garnering donations of metal, electronics, and machinery parts from Bay Area businesses like Bayer Pharmaceuticals, Pacific Pipe, and Union Machine Works, which lent cable-car gears to the cause. Innovative fundraising is a forte here. A winter "Fire Feast" drew over 2,400 guests, who drank fiery cocktails, "dined with Dante" on fiery foods cooked on sculptural stoves, took in live fire performances, and bid on an auction of flame-wrought art. Monthly potluck lectures (sample topic: "Aesthetics of the Big") and gallery shows are also hugely popular. SPARC (Student Programs and Resources at the Crucible) will host an ArtBike workshop this summer, teaching everything from decoration to repair by creating sculptural bicycles from recycled parts.

Sturtz cites three dictionary definitions of the Crucible's namesake. A crucible is: "1. A vessel used for melting materials at high temperatures; 2. A severe test, as of patience or belief; and 3. A place or situation in which concentrated forces converge and interact to cause or influence change or development." Sturtz has seen his share of each of these, especially the second, he says. "It's our rate of growth, and finding the funds to keep up with it—that's our biggest test."

The International Studio and Curatorial Program, New York, NY

Founded in 1994, the ISCP is based in a seven-story brick building in Tribeca. Originally the first mail-order depot in the country, the building's center courtyard once housed package-delivery horses. Today, artists from all over the world hold up to one-year residencies in fifteen studios here and ten more at an annex on 39th Street. They are supported by government cultural organizations, foundations, and corporations, which contribute the

to establish the Atlantic Learning Center, which will explore science and the landscape, the hand of humans on the land, and implications for the future. The Center will bring the community in with education and outreach.

JL: So the Learning Center will act as the flagship, the jumpstart for the whole Highlands Center, and now that you've gone through the research and development phase, you're ready to seek out partner programs.

MB: Yes, Community Partners, our main consultant at this point, hired Barbara Baker for the initial phase of programmatic planning. We had to determine what local organizations believe to be an effective expression of their needs, desires, and concerns. That came out of the focus groups. We also expect regional and national participation. The main thing that's happening this year is the identification and formation of a management partner to help us develop a wish-list of program partners. The Lower Cape Cod Community Development Corporation will be helping us find that entity. It has to work from a business and a legal point of view; it can't be just entirely an artistic creation. There are real-world constraints, but we're working hard to wiggle with those.

JL: I know that some local organizations are interested in participating—the Center for Coastal Studies, the Fine Arts Work Center, WOMR—but what I'm hearing is that the expense of converting the buildings is ...

MB: Very problematic. That's why it's so important that we work with the Congressional delegation. For example, with the Atlantic Learning Center, we'll be asking the Park Service to request a line item appropriation for well over a million dollars to improve the infrastructure in 2002. We're working through Congressman Delahunt's office to get federal funding. Also, the Army Corps of Engineers expressed interest in having a facility here and helping with the demolition of unneeded buildings. The Corps builds dams and re-routes rivers and puts up bridges, and as a result, they have a tremendous mass of archaeological resources that they want to show for public access. We're also hoping that the management partner

will seek private sector funding sources that the Park Service itself can't apply for. We're looking at creative approaches, but non-profit groups may have to rehab their own interior space.

JL: So the management structure will make an umbrella fundraising effort for the overall physical site, and local and national arts organizations, which are always strapped for cash, will get some assistance.

MB: Yes. We're envisioning, unless we get incredibly lucky and manna falls from the federal heavens, an ongoing capital fundraising effort by our management partner. We recognize that the basic infrastructure—water service, plumbing, roads, removing hazardous materials from buildings—we need to pony up for that. That might be two-thirds of the expense, but that still leaves a huge third in terms of site improvements—landscaping, interiors, aesthetic improvements, working up space for a potter, or getting the light right for a painter. Partners need to consider how they're going to pay for those things. Most of these organizations have boards, and most are accustomed to raising funds. We know the money is there, the question is how to turn on the tap.

JL: Do you have any interest in maintaining the authenticity of the military structures for history's or curiosity's sake?

MB: Yes, but we certainly wouldn't sacrifice the mission of the Highlands Center for that. Architecturally it's totally uninspired, but the placement of the buildings—bachelor officers' quarters, larger homes for the higher officers, smaller lawns for the junior officers—reveal the sociology of the



PHOTO: STEPHAN SCHOLZ

military during the Cold War era. You feel like you're going to see Gomer Pyle walk by. The command post is the place that shrieks Cold War. It's got its own water filtration system, its own air unit, its own telephone system. I've only made it a few feet in the doorway because it's like a sarcophagus. I've got to go up there with boots and a headlamp someday. During public tours we heard some neat stories associated with that period and that set of buildings. For a long time, that 500-person base was really important to the town of Truro, and people would like to see that acknowledged and remembered.

JL: Tell me what you learned from the focus groups you held with the arts community?

MB: Artists said very clearly they wanted studio space, not just a teaching venue, but a place for people to work. We were told to provide common space—if people eat together then all sorts of wonderful things happen. They said, don't try to set up formal structures, it won't work. Allow it to happen and it will. There was also a lot of discussion about interdisciplinary exchange.

JL: Are only non-profit organizations eligible, or can individual artists lease studios?

MB: We don't plan to prepare a bunch of studios and then rent them out to artists. Organizations that serve artists need to come forward. At the Fort Mason Center, they rent out to private groups at market rate, which is sky high, and use that revenue to subsidize the non-profit space. That won't work here because we don't have the turnover that a community like San Francisco has. Furthermore, some of the uses that you would assume we could readily make money from would compete with local business. We can't do that. So we're looking instead for profit organizations that can bring new business into the community in ways that are not incompatible with our mission. They would be our cash cows.

JL: I ask about possibilities for individuals because in the focus groups, artists said that above all, they need studio space. Residency programs, such as the Fine Arts Work Center, are extraordinarily competitive; they bring in the very best of the best from all over the country. So most local artists are not

\$50,000 per year cost of a Manhattan studio, living space, and stipend. Dennis Elliott, Director, points to a map above his office door with pins marking participating artists' origins. Europe is especially dense with pins. He pages through an album of photographs of artists from Poland, the Czech Republic, and Cyprus, and says that artists from Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and Canada are on their way.

Elliott likens his enterprise to a Canal Street mom-and-pop shop. It runs on a business-model and is not perceived, like many residencies, as a retreat. Locating funding and kindling publicity are primary concerns. Elliott spends most of his time fundraising, seeking grants for general operating expenses (partially covered by the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts), and negotiating support from abroad. He works overtime to introduce ISCP artists to "the best New York has to offer," and chooses artists who are not only brilliant, but ambitious. He says he "can almost smell" those who really want to achieve. Artists have regular studio visits with leading critics and curators, and open studio nights, held twice per year, often lead to gallery shows. Elliott promotes his artists in more unorthodox ways, too—attempting to get their work in Barney's' windows, for instance. During the Louima and Diallo trials, he urged the NYPD to show a resident artist's paintings of officers with halos atop their heads.

For ten years prior to founding the ISCP, Elliott oversaw residencies for American artists, but found the paucity of public arts funding in this country prohibitive. Foreign artists, he discovered, were more amply subsidized. When asked about differences between American and international artists, Elliott says he finds American artists slightly more object-oriented. He notices, too, that artists from abroad have nationalistic arguments, and "being in a

strange land, they bond." Beyond that, Elliott says he rarely takes the time to "philosophize on artists crossing borders." Rather, he contends with the real-world truth that art is a profession, requiring as much skill and savvy as any other.

Redmoon Theater, Chicago, IL

Redmoon has been producing "visionary spectacle theater" since 1990. Its mission is "to celebrate the human condition by creating original theater art grounded in the accessible, yet sophisticated, world of puppets, masks, and objects." Their signature events are the annual "All Hallows' Eve Ritual Celebration," and "Winter Pageant"—parade/performance that invite the whole community to honor the spirits and seasons in a way our culture has mostly forgotten. The 1999 Halloween ritual featured a fire performance team, jugglers, and stilt-walkers wearing huge, bird-like heads who thrilled a crowd of 10,000. A *Chicago Sun-Times* critic described the evening as "incomparably magical," and concluded, "Anyone in doubt about the power of art to galvanize a community and create a miraculous, peaceable kingdom would have been transformed into a believer." An innovative *Moby Dick* put Redmoon on the staged performance map, and award-winning productions of *Frankenstein* and *The Ballad of Frankie and Johnny* followed at Chicago's prestigious Steppenwolf Theater, where *Hunchback*, an adaptation of Hugo's classic, opened to raves in May. Children's programs include *Dramagirls*, which uses performance skills like stilt-walking, drumming, and storytelling to empower middle-school girls.

Artistic Director Jim Lasko reflected recently on the appeal of puppets: "The puppet has many virtues. Besides being egoless, demanding no benefits or even pay, they are incredibly

going to be able to utilize that space. But if you provide individual studio spaces, everyone will be eligible.

MB: The management partner could choose to do that, or they could look for a partner willing to handle that. I don't think every individual would have to be incorporated. They may have to give back somehow. For example, the dune shacks in the Provincelands that are run by the Community Compact and the Consortium—they provide space to artists and have a payback requirement. There have been poetry readings, exhibits, the idea being that the broader visiting public gets a tiny peek. In one program, twice a week, a small group of visitors goes out and talks to the artist-in-residence.

JL: You have looked at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area as a model. Have you looked at non-government organizations? I'm thinking of Mass MOCA, which has magically revitalized an old mill town in Western Massachusetts.

MB: We had a roundtable last fall—some big names from the arts world off-Cape—and they were blown away by the site and its potential and said we've got wonderful ingredients for a fabulous program. They also told us that we have to be clear on whether we were going to just rent space or create some sort of curated experience, whether partner programs would be expected to participate in a broader context.

JL: A curated experience, that's a good term. I'm picturing Mystic Seaport, where you come expecting about a half-dozen related experiences. You want to see a little historical re-enactment, some beautiful wooden boats, to learn how to tie some knots, to have some grog. The Highlands Center won't have that degree of synergy, but I've got a sense there will be some sort of collaboration between organizations.

MB: The partner organization can decide that their organization wants to move in that direction or not. We need to provide the context, the harness, but we don't want to make the harness so small that only two horses fit. I'm deliberately not being

too definitive because I want the management partner to own some of that decision.

JL: Have you mapped out a hypothetical group of partners that would represent the scope you're looking for—a theater company, a children's science center, a studio collective?

MB: Yes, I think in a broad sense we could probably come up with a list of fifteen different functions that we would hope to have here. But in terms of specific organizations, or even specific activities, we're wide open.

JL: Is there anything that individuals can do now to contribute or participate, or is that down the line? I know there's enormous community interest.

MB: I can think of a thousand things, but I'm afraid to unleash the floodgates. Technically, the site is closed to the public because it's not safe. But we gave tours last year because we want people to get accustomed to moving in and out of that space. This summer we're also having story-telling, not just tours. People who know stories are welcome to share that with us. At the roundtable they said, get some life in there, have an Easter egg hunt. We're so thinly equipped that I can't start issuing permits right and left, but if someone has a really great idea, we might just take them up on it. It's as helpful to the Congressional delegation as it is to us to know that there's community support. I'm not allowed to tell people to lobby Congress, but I can simply say any expression of public support helps.

JL: What about an old-fashioned barn-raising? With so many construction workers in the community and so many landscapers—they could get a tax write-off for in-kind services, or just volunteer, to contribute toward renovation.

MB: That's a great idea. We're allowed, by law, to accept volunteer services. Still—and I hate to sound like a wet blanket—it would have to be cleared through the union and workers would have to sign a volunteer agreement so that in case of injury, they're covered under Workmen's Comp. It gives us legal cover in the event that someone decides to sue. I've never had a volunteer disabled, but just in case.

JL: In other words, there'd be some red tape.

MB: Yes, but it would be possible. It's complicated right now by the fact that there are still some hazardous materials out there—asbestos, lead paint—which we're required by law to remove a certain way. Once those are gone, we would be able to do that sort of thing. We're also looking for people to serve on the board of the non-profit management partner. This will be a working board, a get-your-hands-dirty job, not an honorary activity.

JL: What do you picture five, ten, fifteen years down the line? Learning centers, studios, performance spaces—I can't help but have a totally utopian vision—a dozen or so organizations, each of them working in their own creative realm, but with foot traffic between them that would inspire mind traffic. And all on a bluff at the edge of the sea.

MB: I've envisioned it a thousand times, and every time I do, it's a little different. We have committed to Truro that there won't be anything that would invite a volume that unduly intrudes on the town. I do think there's room for performance spaces, especially in the off-season. Certain types of arts don't exist unless there's an audience, but this is not a venue for the general, casual visitor. I wouldn't envision a tour bus stopping here. Without question, there will be access for the local community. There's no reason why every kid who goes to a school on the Outer Cape can't have some kind of programming opportunity at the Highlands Center—let's give them something different from the skateboard park or the beach in the summer. I envision intergenerational programs—maybe senior artists working with children who are struggling with math, and somehow through the form and structure of art, the child learns. I see mixing and mingling so that all kinds of work is nurtured by other disciplines in a very concentrated setting and venue. These are really utopian kinds of things, but they can happen. Why can't they happen here? If what we offer works for people, then they will come and help build. I know that to be true.

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flexible and never lie. But what is most exciting about the puppet is that it adores collaboration and promotes community. ... Like having a common friend at a table with strangers, the puppet promotes healthy conversation, demonstrates our differences, and highlights our similarities. ... It is acrobatic, expressive, and unflappable. With the right urging, it can do almost anything. But the puppet's appeal goes beyond that to something more esoteric, less conscious, and perhaps, deeper and more meaningful. A puppet on stage relieves us of the obligations to the 'realism' that dominates film, television, and most theater. Puppets don't ask us to 'willingly suspend our disbelief,' as Diderot understood the audience's responsibilities to realism. They ask that we actively manufacture belief. The puppet relies on the audience's assistance. Its face never changes or exhibits feeling. It doesn't glance or transform. Nothing happens without the audience willing it to be so. And this, it seems to me, is the gift of the puppet: the gentle reminder that belief is an exercise, a willful act of consciousness that we can employ to transform our reality."

The Revolving Museum, Boston, MA

The Revolving Museum, which develops public art projects involving artists, youth, and communities, was founded in 1984 by artist Jerry Beck. For years it was a nomadic endeavor—transforming abandoned sites, railway cars for instance, into temporary installations and performance spaces. In 1998, the museum settled in a 30,000 square-foot former wallpaper mill in Fort Point Channel, a factory zone inhabited by hundreds of artists since the early '80s. It houses two exhibition spaces, fifty low-cost artists' studios, and a fine arts

print workshop, and hosts the annual Boston Underground Film Festival, but most distinctive are its collaborative youth projects.

"House of Prints" is an ongoing project originated by program director Bo Lembo, who works with multi-ethnic students using printmaking as a device to consider and compare diverse understandings of home and family. Lembo brings in guest artists to teach the printmaking techniques of their homelands, such as East Africa and Japan. Lembo also got the "I Scream Art Truck" on the road. The converted ice cream van travels to street corners, parks, and festivals offering programs led by artists like Ifé Franklin, whose workshops explored homophobia in the African-American community. "Wonders of the World" is a biennial large-scale interactive carnival created by youth and community groups. "Together We Believe in Us" was a writing and art project conducted between students from a Jewish and a Catholic school. All of these projects are highly participatory: "The idea that art can be made *by* people as well as *for* people is central to the Revolving Museum's mission."

The museum has always been funded largely through government granting agencies, such as the NEA and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. This spring, funding was surprisingly scarce, and Beck was forced to cancel much of this year's programming. Add to this an impending move, and the museum is about to revolve again. Fort Point is smack in the middle of the Big Dig, and when the most expensive public works project ever undertaken is over, the area is slated to become a high-priced commercial zone. The museum's lease runs out in a year, so it, and many local artists, are preparing for displacement. Lembo says the shock has worn off, and sounds positive about looking at sites in Lowell. If all else fails, he says, they might just go back to their vagabond roots. "We can do it in our apartments if we have to."

Ghost Music in the Dunes

ROBERT FINCH

These are the wine days, the high autumn days on the Cape, and there is no better place to spend them than in the dunes. Thanks to the generosity of our friends, Gary and Laurie, Kathy and I are spending a few days at Peg's, one of eighteen remaining dune shacks spread thinly across the broad, sandy expanse of the Provincelands from Race Point to High Head.

The Provincelands encompass several square miles of dune ridges and valleys that sprawl between the town of Provincetown and the Atlantic Ocean at the very tip of Cape Cod. The dune shacks lie along the outermost ridge of dunes, and many of them date back to the early years of the 20th century. The first ones were said to have been built by crew members of the Life Saving Service stations that used to line the outer beach here, enabling the men to bring their families along in the summer months. Others were built later by local and summer people, many of them writers and artists who used the shacks as retreats. Today several are still known by the names of their former owners: Boris', Zara's, Frenchie's, Sunny's, and Peg's.

Peg's is named after its former owner, Peg Watson, who was a social worker in New York City. About a mile east of Peg's was the shack of Charlie Schmid, the legendary "Bird Man" of the dunes who lived there yearround for twenty-three years. Charlie and Peg were said to have been close friends, lovers actually. Over the years Peg spent as much time as she could at her shack until her arthritis became too bad and she went to Boston for knee surgery.

After the operation Peg returned to the dunes to see Charlie, though friends said she really wasn't fit to come. The story is that, on the day of her death, she drove over the sand road in her jeep to Charlie's. When she left in the evening, Charlie watched her go until she disappeared in a dip, and then he went inside. What happened next is conjecture, but apparently, the jeep either stalled or got stuck in the sand, and Peg, using her walker, tried to get to the nearest shack, Zara's, for help. There were two women staying at Zara's and one of them had a dream that night in which she seemed to hear someone crying for help. The next day they found Peg's body in one of the wild cranberry bogs, a place still marked with a cairn of stones gathered from the beach.

Charlie inherited Peg's shack. After his death in the early 1980s, it was acquired by the Cape Cod National Seashore and gradually fell into disrepair. By the time Gary and Laurie leased it from the Seashore, the porch was gone, the floor boards were rotted out, and the roof was about to fall in. Today Peg's has been restored to its original soundness with loving care and attention to detail.

In the mornings we wake to unexpectedly inland sounds: the calls of towhees and bluejays poking and flitting among the thick scrub oak and beachplum

shrubs that surround the shack. A song sparrow peeks up out of the brush to the top of a bayberry twig to see what is going on, chipping loudly. Hundreds of tree swallows buzz low over the shack, all heading west toward Race Point, skimming within a few feet of my head, as if they were flying bombing patterns. Dragonflies—hero darners the size of small helicopters—chop through the soft air, thick with memory.

To the south heavy rains have flooded the cranberry bogs across the jeep trail, turning them all to small, deep-blue lakes. Beyond them, along the crest of the high dunes, the sky-blue water tower and the top of Provincetown's Pilgrim Monument loom like the Dakota Towers and the Plaza Hotel over Central Park, but in reverse scale and relationship. Here it is the park, that is, the Cape Cod National Seashore, which surrounds and dominates Provincetown's miniature metropolis.

We are lazy and grateful, basking in the clear, lucent light under arching, autumn skies. All day the old yellow sightseeing plane drones overhead along the dune ridges. A friend, visiting us, remarks that the same plane has been flying across the same route every summer since he was a boy here forty years ago, "and probably long before that. I bet it's been flying since the 1930s, maybe the 1920s. It's that vintage. Heck, it's been flying so long it's worn a groove in the air. They don't even have to steer it anymore, just give it a kick to get it going."

By late afternoon deep shadows begin to curl into the north-facing hollows of the dunes. We see deer tracks, and large pairs of paw prints that might be from coyotes. In one place the seed stem of a beachgrass plant has been carried along the smooth side of a dune, making a jagged lightning-bolt track in its flank.

Kathy says that the air surrounding these shacks is "old," by which, I take it, she means that it is full of memory. Peg's, like many of the shacks, has a log in which visitors are encouraged to write. In addition to the numerous expressions of gratitude for the gifts of solitude and beauty, there is a wealth of small, careful observations of weather, wildlife, and the shack itself that gradually forms a collective memory of this place. On one wall is a sketch by Bill Evaul, the Truro artist, of the view out the shack's eastern window. In it he has carefully indicated, against the silhouette of the dunes, the former and present positions of the tower of Highland Light, several miles to the southeast, that was moved back from the edge of the sea cliffs this past summer. An event that was publicly reported and celebrated is here recorded as a small but significant milestone in the history of this shack: a fixture in the landscape, already old at the shack's birth, has shifted slightly, but momentarily.

Shortly before sunset, I come in off the porch into the shack and am immediately aware of faint music. Kathy has fallen asleep on the bed, and I think perhaps she has left the portable radio on,

but no, it is turned off. There is, nonetheless, unmistakable music in the air, just above the auditory threshold. It sounds vaguely Middle Eastern: a low flute, or wordless voice, with soft percussion. Perhaps someone in one of the shacks to the west is playing music that is drifting down on the wind. I go outside again, but hear nothing except crickets and surf.

Doubting my ears, I wake Kathy, and she confirms what I hear: low serpentine melodies with a steady, muffled beat underneath. We begin to search the shack from one end to the other, trying to discover its source, lying down on the floor, then standing up on the bed; but it seems to grow no louder or softer no matter where we listen from. Ghost music, it seems—like the crying of babies said to be heard at the sites of certain massacres of Indian villages in the west.

Then the music stops. The indistinguishable words of a woman's voice follow. I turn on the portable radio, twist the dial, and eventually find WOMR, Provincetown's community radio station. Yes, it is their broadcast, but that only displaces the mystery: where is it coming from? We are very close to its transmitter here in the dunes, so close that the station comes in on eight different frequencies across the dial. Could it be that the whole shack—its metal screens and spoons, its iron pump and aluminum pots, its steel refrigerator and stove—are all acting like some kind of enormous antennae, the way that metal fillings in a mouth are sometimes said to do? It's a far-fetched idea, but there seems no other explanation.

Gradually we become more and more obsessed with finding the source, realizing we will not sleep unless we do. We open up drawers, haul out boxes and duffel bags from under the bed, scour the shelves, dig through piles of blankets and clothes. Eventually, we unearth an answer. At the bottom of one of the storage boxes Kathy finds an all-band portable radio. The radio is, in fact, tuned to WOMR and, apparently, was accidentally left programmed to turn on at this time by the previous occupants.

There is relief, of course, in solving the mystery, but as with all mysteries revealed, a certain disappointment as well. Even as we sink into surf-smothered sleep, I continue to hear a low, disembodied, plaintive voice, singing somewhere out among the dark dunes and memory-flooded bogs.

Robert Finch lives in Wellfleet and is the author of four collections of essays including Cape Cod: Its Natural and Cultural History. In 1999 he received a Literary Lights Award from the Boston Public Library.

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"Walking," Cape Cod, and Henry David Thoreau

VINCENT J. CLEARY

HENRY DAVID THOREAU was an inveterate walker. In this he joined many 19th-century men before him; John James Audubon, for example, walked as many as forty miles a day in his investigation of the natural world. That men of this period did so much walking is only partially explained by the fact that the internal combustion engine was yet to be invented. More to the point, Thoreau, along with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Amos Bronson Alcott, and Elizabeth Peabody, was a New England Transcendentalist, serious in the search for a liberating philosophy. Romantic idealists, they had a burning spiritual desire to be at one with the world and its metaphysical immanence. Since God was present in nature, what better way to commune with God than by walking in the great outdoors. Thoreau did so regularly. His two years spent in the woods near Walden Pond, his many writings on nature, on Maine and the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, serve as witness to his desire to be in untamed nature whenever he could, away from cities and confinement.

In 1837, age twenty, a Harvard graduate with a strong grounding in Greek, Latin, and the Classics, Thoreau began deriving an income mainly from writing and lecturing, often about his travels. (To supplement his living, he also did surveying, made pencils, helped to edit *The Dial*, taught school and served at times as a handyman/caretaker for the Emersons.) One of his essays, called "Walking," is a charming piece that deserves to be better known. Were Thoreau alive today, some shoe company would no doubt want to associate his name with its footwear products, a notion that this private, reserved man would probably find incomprehensible at best, reprehensible at worst.

Here is how "Walking" begins: "I wish to speak a word for absolute freedom and wildness as contrasted with freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school committee will take care of that." Thoreau's sense of humor is an unanticipated pleasure in his writings. And how much time spent walking is enough for Thoreau? His answer may surprise us, for few today would be able to spend so much of the day in this pursuit: "I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements." How far could one walk in mid-19th-century Concord and still be in nature? "I can easily walk ten, fifteen, twenty, any number of miles, commencing at my door, without going by any house, without crossing a road except where the

fox and the mink do: first along by the river, and then the brook, and then the meadow and the woodside. There are square miles in my vicinity which have no inhabitant. From many a hill I can see civilization and the abodes of man afar." (He is probably referring here to Boston, twenty miles distant by his estimation.) What was the preferred direction of his walks? "When I go out of the house for a walk, uncertain as to whither I will bend my steps, and submit myself to my instinct to decide for me, I find, strange and whimsical as it may seem, that I finally and inevitably settle southwest, toward some particular wood or meadow or deserted pasture or hill in that direction."

"Walking" was published in 1861, a year before Thoreau's death from tuberculosis in the following spring, at the age of forty-four. Earlier, in October, 1849, in June, 1850, and last in July, 1855, Thoreau completed three week-long walks on Cape Cod's Outer banks, what he refers to as "its bare and bended arm." On the first and last of these walks, he was accompanied by his friend and fellow Transcendentalist, William Ellery Channing, though he doesn't identify Channing by name in the book based on these walks, *Cape Cod*, published posthumously in 1865.

Starting at what is now Coast Guard Beach, near Nauset Light, the two men walked north toward Race Point in Provincetown, some twenty-eight miles distant by Thoreau's reckoning. In all, Thoreau walked the Outer Cape twice, the bayside once. On this first walk, he and Channing stayed in a lighthouse, a fishing shack, and also took lodging in Provincetown. Three days were spent on each walk, so the two walked on average eight to ten miles a day. Walking in sand, then or now, is not easy. Thoreau blends all three journeys into one account, describing one, rather than three, walks.

Keeping to his philosophy of walking in nature, Thoreau avoids towns, with the exception of Provincetown in the last chapter, Chapter 10, and for the most part avoids people, the exception here being an amusing account of the Wellfleet Oysterman in Chapter 5. There is much irony, bemusement, joy even in *Cape Cod*, another surprise. What Thoreau captures in *Cape Cod*, better than any writer on the Outer Cape that I know, including the close second—Henry Beston's *The Outermost House*, is the exact feel imparted by the shoreline and dune, their beauty, barrenness, their sense of solitude. Thoreau is pleased with his early efforts. Having just encountered the Outer Cape beach for the first time, astride a dune, the shore line before him, he observes: "There I had got the Cape under me, as much as if I were riding it barebacked, not as on the map, or seen from the stagecoach; but there I found it out of doors, huge and real, Cape Cod! as it cannot be colored on a map, color it as you will."

For Thoreau, dune and shoreline contain the real Cape. Does he get it just right, and is his

description of this stretch of beach in 1849 accurate today? Determining to answer this question, two summers ago I retraced Thoreau's steps up the Outer Cape. Others have taken this same journey, and two books I recommend are *Walking the Shores of Cape Cod* by Elliott G. Carr, published in 1997, and *Traces of Thoreau* by David Mulloney, from 1998. Both are well written, interesting books, though these writers pursued different tasks than the one I set for myself. Carr walked the entire perimeter of Cape Cod, some 250 miles in all, swimming thirty-one inlets and estuaries as he went. His book takes an essentially ecological tack. Mulloney repeats Thoreau's entire journey and updates the tale to the present day. He is as interested in the journey to and from the Cape, the people and places he encounters, as in the actual beach walk itself. He writes about modern Cape oystermen and the present status of the Cape in general. My focus, by contrast, would be on the dunes and beach and how little or much they have changed since Thoreau's time.

My conclusion? Thanks in large part to the 1961 Congress, when Massachusetts' native son, Thomas "Tip" O'Neill was Speaker of the House and Brookline-born John Fitzgerald Kennedy occupied the Presidency, both the Cape's Outer beach, and North Carolina's Outer Banks became National Seashores, owned by all the people and not a moneyed few. That 1961 Act brought two unrivalled eastern shorelines under the aegis of the Department of the Interior, to remain public beaches in perpetuity, for our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren to enjoy. What a marvelous legacy to bequeath to future generations! Much is owed to the Congress and the President who signed the Cape Cod National Seashore Act into being. This is a remarkable piece of legislation. As a result, the Outer Cape shoreline is little changed from Thoreau's time.

Compare the National Seashore lands with what is happening on the rest of the overcrowded Cape: the overbuilding; the "trophy" homes, many only seasonally occupied; the frequent bottlenecks on the Bourne and Sagamore Bridges; the "privatization" of many town beaches; the frequent revetments built into the ocean and bay; the bumper-to-bumper traffic heading into Provincetown on rainy days when the beaches are less attractive; the mid-week traffic jams in Hyannis and Chatham; the two-thirds of the Cape's beaches that are privately owned. In Massachusetts, unlike many other states, the homeowner possesses down to the low-, not the high-water mark, making passage, even for a casual beachwalker like myself, above the low-water mark, illegal trespassing. The homeowner can ask the walker, as happened to me and my family once in Harwichport, to vacate "his" property.

Lastly, I would cite the houses built too close to the water on the ocean side, and nature's relentless power to reclaim the shoreline for herself,

as happened to a number of homes in Chatham during a 1987 storm. On the positive side, the November 1998 vote that limits growth and attempts to protect the fragile water table on the Cape, a vote which passed after earlier defeats, is a step in the right direction. Because the shoreline protected by this act is so extensive, it is always possible to find, even on the most crowded weekends, a National Seashore beach, like Race Point, that is not overcrowded. It is, of course, stretching things to say that Thoreau's *Cape Cod* was a factor in the passage of these protections, though he would certainly have approved it. In "Walking" he presciently warns of the "No Trespassing" signs that may appear around Concord and what this will mean for walkers like himself. His description rings true for the present Cape as well:

At present, in this vicinity, the best part of the land is not private property; the landscape is not owned, and the walker enjoys comparative freedom. But possibly the day will come when it will be partitioned off into so-called pleasure grounds, in which a few will take a narrow and exclusive pleasure only—when fences shall be multiplied, and man-traps and other engines invented to confine man to the public road, and walking over the face of God's earth shall be construed to mean trespassing on some gentleman's grounds. To enjoy a thing exclusively is commonly to exclude yourself from the true enjoyment of it. Let us improve our opportunities, then, before the evil days come.

The second-to-last sentence here might serve as the motto for the Cape Cod National Seashore. A similar public spiritedness informs the National Seashore Act of 1961.

Now to my walk up the Cape, and a brief description of each day's journey, drawing comparisons with Thoreau's experiences as I go.

Day 1, Coast Guard Beach to Cahoon Hollow Beach, 7.3 miles. An omen, a good one, I think, as I start my walk. It is 7:30 a.m. A fisherman has landed a striped bass, at least thirty-six inches long, the minimum length for keeping, and it lies sleek and glistening in the morning sun. Once almost extinct, the fish has made a dramatic comeback, like the osprey population, another Cape success story. Can the once-strong George's Bank fisheries, mentioned by Thoreau, be returned to their former prominence? The striped bass resurgence suggests that, in time, they can.

High tide today is at 8:30. I try to walk, barefoot, as close to the retreating waves on the strand as I can, hoping for harder sand and somewhat easier walking. I can make about a mile every half hour, matching Thoreau's pace. But speed is not the important thing today; enjoyment and observation

are. Thoreau makes only passing references to the difficulties of walking in soft sand. Why? I wonder. The sand is never firm enough and walking this shore will prove difficult all the way to Race Point.

Sand dunes, about seventy feet high, are my constant companion to the left. I observe bank swallows, close to the top of the dunes, who fly straight into their nests to feed their young. (Thoreau counts 200 bank swallows in Truro.) There are not great numbers of birds on the beach: cormorants, which have become a nuisance in Orleans; the occasional tern; scoters, black sea-diving ducks; semipalmated plovers, but not great flocks of any one type. Perhaps there is more food on the bayside today. The piping plover, which is protected, I have yet to see here, but I have read that this bird too is making a modest comeback.

Opposite Wellfleet, near Marconi Station, about a quarter mile offshore, the 1717 wreck of the *Whylah* has been discovered by salvage hunters a few days before. Thoreau comments on his walk on the wreck of the *Franklin* and the "wreckers" whose living depends on scavenging things from the sea, including shipwrecks, some lured to their ruin by lanterns swung to and fro on the beach. Firewood on this part of the Cape is valued, trees being in short supply. The later term for wreckers, one Thoreau does not use in Cape Cod, is "mooncussers."

As I climb the steep dune at Cahoon Hollow to reclaim my bike parked at the Beachcomber, I am met by three ladies from Rhode Island as they descend the dune. One of them says, to no one in particular, "We've got nothing like this in Rhode Island," to which, amused, I can only add a whispered "Amen." The Beachcomber is one of those loud, live music bars set close to the beach and though it is midday, it is already doing a brisk business. Thoreau has some strong words to say about bars. In Chapter 3, "The Plains of Nauset," he comments: "I was glad to have got out of the towns, where I am wont to feel unspeakably mean and disgraced,—to have left behind me for a season the barrooms of Massachusetts, where the full-grown are not weaned from savage and filthy habits."

Day 2, Cahoon Hollow to Longnook Beach, 6 miles. Many sanderlings, smallish wading birds, skitter up and down the beach, first before, then after me as I walk. I come upon a dead skate on the beach. It has been picked clean by the gulls and the ocean, a skeleton only. I have never seen one this close up. The water temperature is in the low sixties, and a few people are swimming. Just a few days before, close to where I am walking, beyond the dune in an area not visible to me, a murder and apparent suicide have taken place. The woman, it seemed, was killed first, then the man

took his own life. Her body was found in the trunk of a large-model Lincoln left on Pamet Road, and his was just nearby. The Pamet River once breached the beach here, but the dune has reestablished itself and I do not visit the murder site. I think of the skate skeleton I just left on the beach. Nature cleans up after herself, at least. Thoreau would have commented on these two deaths, just as he notes in Cape Cod the report of a bank robbery in Provincetown and how he and his walking companion were later suspects in the crime, if only momentarily.

It is a very hot day and the sun's rays reflected off the water make it even hotter. Between Longnook and Ballston Beaches, well off to my left, back by the dunes, above eye level as I am walking on the shoreline and the tide is out, I see a sunbather raise his head and note my passing. The beach here is otherwise deserted. Later, after I have passed the spot, which I had read earlier was a nude beach, two middle-aged souls, both naked, make their way down to the ocean for a swim. They had not violated my privacy and I had respected theirs, but it was amusing to see, at a distance, their darker upper and lower bodies and their whiter midsections. It reminded me of zebra striping, human variety. Would Thoreau have been amused? Would he have approved this return to a more natural state? Yes on both counts.

A constant in my walks along the ocean's edge is the sound of the sea. Thoreau comments on this too, "the music of the ocean." Today the sea is mild, waves only a foot or so high. Still, for their size, they are quite loud at times as they break in unison on the shore, a noisy yet reassuring background sound as I make my way up the beach. Viewing the sea is the main purpose of Thoreau's walk, as he says in the opening paragraph of *Cape Cod*: "Wishing to get a better view than I had yet had of the ocean ... I made a visit to Cape Cod in October, 1849." As the book proceeds, it is the sea and not the land which more attracts him. He quotes Homer's descriptions of the sea, twelve references in all, most in the original Greek and without translation, probably chosen for their onomatopoeic effect: "potamoío méga sthénos 'Oceanío'" ("the great strength of the Ocean stream").

He is fascinated by the sound of the sea, as am I. It has become my companion and when I return home, I will listen over and over to its sound, captured on the tapes I have made while walking up the beach on the ocean's edge. They will help to soften the winter's harshness.

Six miles today, 13.3 miles completed thus far, almost half finished my walk. I am beginning to believe my goal is achievable. My feet and legs are



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sunburned, but not too badly. For the first time, I am confident I will complete the walk.

Day 3, Longnook Beach to Head of the Meadow Beach, 2.8 miles. I complete this short, uneventful walk as the rains begin, then walk to Dutra's in North Truro to get lunch and catch the bus to Eastham. I wait out the rain, coming down quite hard now, in the North Truro Library, attracting some stares as I enter, soaking wet, squish, squish, squish. On a rainy day on the Cape, everyone within twenty-five miles of Provincetown heads there and traffic on Route 6 north-bound is bumper-to-bumper. The bus does not appear and it is only later that I understand why, this traffic jam. Thinking I've missed the bus, I stick out my thumb, depending on the kindness of strangers.

My first ride, a congenial lady making her weekly run to the town landfill in her Volvo station wagon, takes me well past her destination, out of kindness. Two male college students from Virginia, campers, next pick me up. They seem a bit skeptical of my story but they take me to a traffic light where I will have a better chance for a lift. Third ride—luck of the Irish!—is from a lifeguard at Head of the Meadow who knows some of the coaches where I teach and who, shades of the generosity Thoreau encountered on the Cape, offers me the rent-free off-season use of his owner-built home in Truro, which he rents in the summer months. I'll call him "Charles." Bearded, darkly tanned, he takes me almost to my doorstep though this was much out of his way. Thoreau would have enjoyed him, I think, a storyteller, raconteur, a modern-day Wellfleet oysterman. Kindness is always welcome, especially from strangers.

Day 4, Head of the Meadow Beach to High Head, 2 miles. We, my wife and I, have had company over the weekend, so for several days I have not been walking. Now more than halfway to Provincetown, the sand, as Thoreau had predicted, is coarser and darker. The dunes begin to flatten out too. Many black-backed gulls today, great flocks of them. And a sanderling with only one working leg. He has a second, which he uses like a crutch. He hops along, and once airborne, has no trouble. Laughing gulls are more numerous too. The tides being later, perhaps the pickings are better. I count the number of steps these large birds take to become airborne and it is eight, on average. I wonder if these laughing gulls find me amusing. They seem to. The ocean is quite cold on this dreary, overcast day. No one is in the water. Thoreau no doubt used days like these to fill out his account with historical lore, the history of the various ministers at Eastham, for example, in Chapter 3. Was Thoreau, like his contemporary Dickens, paid by the word? This may explain the attention he gives to flora and fauna, complete with their Latin names.

Perhaps this sort of digression is what his editor at *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* objected to, and why, after the first episodes were published, Thoreau withdrew *Cape Cod* from publication. While not pretending that *Cape Cod* is a literary masterpiece, I would argue that such descriptions

add local color and help to create the feel of the Cape that, in my view, makes the book worth reading.

Day 5, High Head to Race Point, 6 miles. Blue sky, water temperature a frigid fifty-nine degrees, too cold for swimming, as I learned later in the day. Many protected tern nesting grounds to my left, sand dunes now almost level with the beach. The first off-road vehicles appear. As this is a rather deserted part of the beach, I am grateful for their company. I try to walk in their tracks, hoping for easier going. No luck.

It still intrigues me that Henry David comments so little on the walking, or such mundane details as what he carried with him. I have in my knapsack the following: lunch, binoculars, several maps, a towel, and a book on Cape birds. What did he carry? I wonder, and except for the large clam he ate, which he describes, what else did he eat on the beach? I see my first starfish, about six inches long, on the walk, and after examination, return him, or her, to the sea. Parabolic sand dunes on my left remind me of the opening scene in *Lawrence of Arabia*. Great tangles of brown seaweed line the shore and cling to my ankles, washed up after the storm yesterday.

There is almost no one on this stretch of beach, but I do observe in the distance a woman constructing what looks like an altar. A little later, three women, sitting yoga-style on the beach, seem absorbed in a meditation exercise. They face the ocean silently and are, I suspect, serene. Encountering me on this hard-to-get-to-beach was probably a surprise.

Thoreau notes how misleading it is to look at objects on the beach from a distance. They seem larger than they actually are. Distances appear misleading too, no doubt due to the way light reflects off the water and the sand. More vehicles as I approach Race Point. Twelve are clustered shoreside. The occupants all seem to know one another. A family reunion? I pick up another little skate to examine it, only to receive a painful prick in my finger that will take about a week to heal. I reach Race Point. There are many sunbathers, very few bathers. Hot, tired, sweaty, I plunge in anyway. It's colder than I thought, much colder. Fortunately at a number of beaches on the Outer Cape, the Park Service has installed showers, johns, and changing rooms. The showers are cold too, but less so than the ocean water. Refreshed, I silently thank the Park Service for these amenities. One more stretch to go.

Day 6, Race Point to Herring Cove Beach, 3 miles. The final day of my walk, and what a revelation! These last three miles do not follow the beach but instead head inland, following the bike trail which will take me to Herring Cove Beach, where I've parked the car. Unlike the flat beaches earlier, there is much up and down walking here. I traverse first the Race Point trail, then the Province Lands trail, to my destination.

The dunes here, great undulating hills and valleys, remind me of a moonscape. Lots of craters and drifts, and now for the first time, large populations of beach grass, rose hips, shrub pines, and oaks. These trees, many of them, are little more than eye-level high but very wide at the base, as

Thoreau describes the apple trees there—low and hugging the ground. Walking on a path is not at all like walking on the beach and my pace picks up, a nice change on my last day.

Small boats appear, but not in the numbers Thoreau described. He counts a hundred sailboats, I see eight. I do see the whale-watching boats out of Provincetown, as well as two large ocean liners, one heading north, the other south. Why doesn't the south-bound boat use the Cape Cod Canal? Perhaps its keel is too large but this seems unlikely. The sound of the sea is muted here, the first time that I have not been accompanied by its majestic cadences. This is the first time too, that I've been on the dunes, prohibited earlier. Thoreau, though, often observes the ocean from the vantage point of the dunes. In some places they are eighty feet high, offering good views north and south, fore and aft.

The water temperature is a bit warmer today, sixty-four degrees, and I take my final dip in the ocean. It has taken me six days to accomplish what Thoreau and his friend took three to do, but I am satisfied. It has been hard but rewarding. 27.1 miles in thirteen hours, fifty-five minutes, an average matching Thoreau's, about two miles an hour. It is over.

The beach on the Outer Cape is very little changed, if at all, from the way Thoreau described it in 1849, despite the dramatic changes that have taken place on the rest of the Cape. Thoreau charts his walk and subtly encourages us to follow in his footsteps, as I have done, as you can do. I recommend this walk. Thanks largely to the National Seashore Act of 1961, walks such as this, on pristine beaches such as these, will be possible as long as the Cape shall last, 10,000 years according to some geologists' estimates. The final words will be Thoreau's. Here is how he ends *Cape Cod*, with a warning about its future use. His cautionary words could not be more apt today:

The time must come when this coast will be a place of resort for those New-Englanders who really wish to visit the sea-side. At present it is wholly unknown to the fashionable world, and probably it will never be agreeable to them. If it is merely a ten-pin alley, or a circular railway, or an ocean of mint-julip, that the visitor is in search of,—if he thinks more of the wine than the brine, as I suspect some do at Newport,—I trust that for a long time he will be disappointed here. But this shore will never be more attractive than it is now. Such beaches as are fashionable are here made and unmade in a day, I may almost say, by the sea shifting its sands. Lynn and Nastasket! this bare and bended arm it is that makes the bay in which they lie so snugly. What are springs and waterfalls? Here is the spring of springs, the waterfall of waterfalls. A storm in the fall and winter is the time to visit it; a light-house or a fisherman's hut the true hotel. A man may stand there and put all America behind him.

To which I say, aloud this time, Amen.

Vincent J. Cleary is Professor Emeritus of Classics at UMass, Amherst, and a freelance writer living in Sunderland, Massachusetts.

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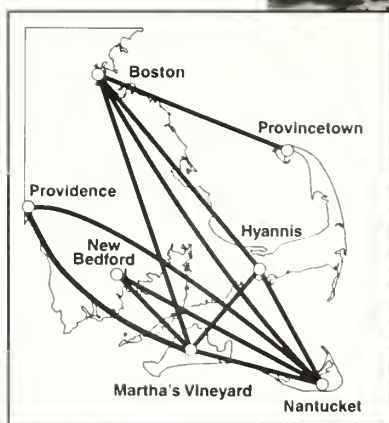
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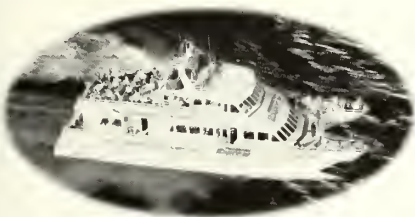
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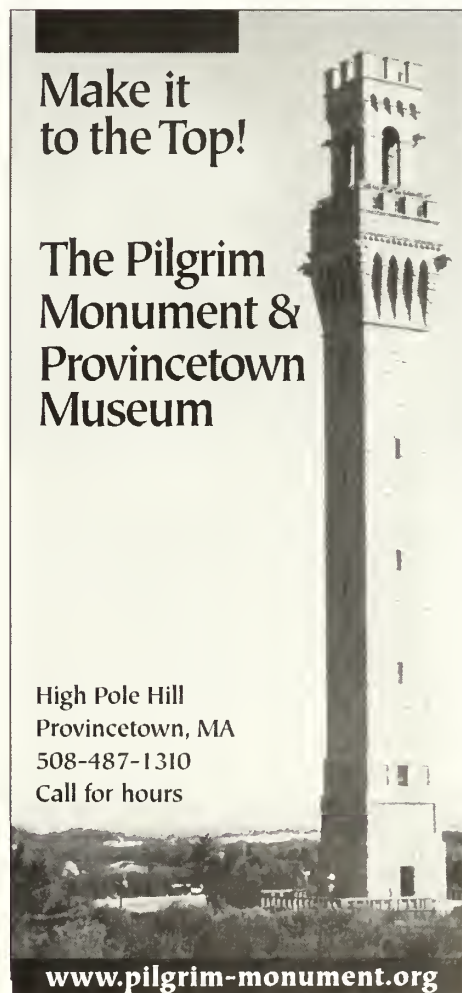
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FAWC FELLOWS, 1992 (L TO R: DUANE SLICK, PAUL LISICKY, ALICIA HENRY, MARY BEHRENS, JANE FINE, JACKIE WOODSON, JIM ESBER, NICK FLYNN, TIM SEIBLES)

MARY BEHRENS

Art, Friendship, and Ping-Pong

From an early age I had been a great consumer of biographies. My favorite ones were about famous artists and writers and the worlds they inhabited. Paris in the '30s—Anais Nin with her pack of devoted artist friends and lovers; New York in the '50s—the guys with their monstrous paintings, their women, their slavish dealers and collectors; and Provincetown throughout the century—cheap and welcoming to migratory artists and writers seeking a hit of dunes and sea, away from the swirling art scene, the city heat.

These examples developed in me a strong yearning for café life, not to mention bar life, basically a sort of hanging-out life, populated with wonderfully interesting people. Back in my early twenties, embarking on a wobbly art life of my own, I kept wondering where such lively social scenes might exist. Sure, I was making art, thinking a lot about art and of course, wondering (agonizing) about how I was going to support myself—*was I really destined to be a waitress for the next twenty years?* I made many artist friends, mostly in Boston's South End, where we all had studios. Yet I continually longed for a sense of community. It seemed we were all too busy then dashing between jobs to create anything resembling what I had, romantically I suppose, hoped for. Which was this: a busy life, yet one with time for sitting around somewhere, *anywhere*, with a gang of like-minded folks, sipping coffee, drinking wine, smoking the occasional cigarette, sharing ideas, shooting the breeze, talking Art.

When I arrived at the Fine Arts Work Center in '91, I knew I had found it—at last, a place where people had the time and desire to discuss not only our work, but other issues flying about then in the waning reign of Bush and Quayle, when the economy was taking a nosedive, when the charge of sexual harassment, not to mention its pronunciation, had everyone scratching their heads. I remember the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings—not one of us, as I recall, believed him for a second. We'd toss around race and gender, sexual preference, identity politics, monogamy, good/bad movies, where to live, whether to teach

and, always, how to just *survive*. The group that year was an extraordinary bunch: Jim Esber, Itty Neuhaus, Nick Flynn, Tim Seibles, Jane Fine, Bob Bailey, Duane Slick, Jackie Woodson, Paul Lisicky, Deborah Artman, and Danella Carter, to name a few. We heard that it was a rare thing at the Work Center for all twenty artists and writers to actually like each other. We, remarkably, did. Though I don't know the diversity spectrum of ensuing years at the Work Center, our year was a first for its more realistic reflection of American demographics. We were black, white, Native American, gay, straight, and at a time when university departments across the country were imploding, squabbling over multicultural quotas and gender-lopsidedness, we all got along, smack in the middle of the Rodney King era.

We shared meals, the usual poverty fare—pasta, beans, rice, the *occasional* chicken—but with flair, with style. We joked about our loud weekly dance parties, calling them "love fests," not for their sexual looseness, though there was certainly some of that, but for the affection we all shared, the raucous fun we had rocking out to blasting boom boxes, gyrating to the likes of Queen Latifah, Counting Crows, The Replacements, Arrested Development, or whatever was around. We had plenty of studio time, too. I remember wonderful visits from Jim, Jane, Itty, Tim, Bob, and Nick, who would saunter over for a look at works-in-progress, offering smart takes, questioning, discussing other work, making me laugh.

Sad as it was leaving the Work Center, I made great friends there, people who today form the heart of my social life. And luckily, another station for friendships has come along in Provincetown to expand the welcome for more artists and writers. When DNA Gallery opened its doors in the spring of 1994, I was happy to be among the motley crowd of artists Nick Lawrence chose to jump-start the very risky business of a contemporary art gallery. From its beginnings the gallery has featured experimental work including performance art, video screenings, sound installations, and a reading series.

The connection between the Work Center and DNA Gallery is not official and may well be exaggerated by my own biased and fond attachments to both places, but they do share a pluralist sensibility that seems a fitting condition to *fin de siècle* ideas—new technologies, new demographics, and a wide range of possibility. Speaking generally, if the decades between 1960 and 1990 contained one or two major art movements each (Pop, Minimalism, Conceptual, Neo-Expressionism, etc.), the '90s, in contrast, were marked by a willful resistance to any hegemonic model. Installation, video, performance, sound, biomorphic abstraction, hard-edged abstraction, cartoon-inspired abstraction, environmental art, and computer-generated art, all found equal footing in the '90s whirlwind of high and low and political and apolitical art. DNA artists and former fellows Jenny Humphreys, Bob Bailey, Susan Lyman, Hiroyuki Hamada, Tabitha Ververs, and Nick Kahn and Richard Selesnick project and share no specific aesthetic agenda, yet this is exactly what brings them together—a kind of camp-less spirit.

Alongside stylistic links, DNA and the Work Center share another feature that adds to my perception of both as friendly, corner store-ish haunts—ping-pong tables. Swinging by DNA mid-afternoon in July to chat with Jennifer, Nick, Kelly, Zach, or whoever is around, then meeting up with Damion, my loyal partner, Chris, Jane, Doug, or some other ping-pong addict for a quick set downstairs is truly a great social experience. I've never been athletic enough to develop an obsession with one sport—a little tennis here and there, throw-like-a-girl softball on occasion, skiing as a kid. Yet ping-pong is my kind of game—social, safe, a game that requires skill, reflex, and strategy yet not particularly large muscles. Friendships have been made over the ping-pong table, and if not quite broken over it, well ... perhaps occasionally ruptured. Ping-pong has inspired art talk, joking around, some mean competition, even love affairs. Without going too far into my personal lust for the game, I will say that ping-pong, with its dual tensions and ease, has ruled a large part of my social life in Provincetown.

Another aspect of DNA that brings friends together is its back porch. An admittedly partial opinion, DNA's openings are the most relaxed and fun in town. (How many galleries *anywhere* have porches?) On a warm summer night, everyone, not just smokers, drifts out to the porch for its view of the tennis courts, trees, and sky—a soothing retreat from the shoulder-rubbing and hot lights inside. It seems the back porch offers visitors conversational carte blanche, with talk often reaching a feverish pitch as friends and neighbors compare notes on art, poetry, swimming, bugs, high rents, who's seeing who, who's staying the winter, who's going out for dinner, and where?

As we careen into the 21st century, friendship, like reading books, can be pushed aside by lack of time, by other concerns. We race around coddling careers, nurturing children, feeling guilty as parents, feeling guilty as non-parents, clicking between websites seeking the ultimate best deal on anything from utility companies to pet food. It's already a cliché to say we are a fast culture, but we are—and we're getting faster. But friendships, like books, require an occasional shift into low gear. Provincetown, with the Work Center, DNA, ping-pong tables, and other places we all find to congregate, aids the cause. Walking a few blocks down Commercial Street hardly presents the psychic challenge posed by driving around Big Dig Boston or hopping on three trains from Brooklyn to have dinner with someone in Manhattan. Provincetown is a breeding ground for friendships, a welcoming home for me, and I imagine for many others too. And while the world may have changed too much to be all café life, all the time, it's good to know that when you need it, it's always there.

Mary Behrens was a visual arts fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in 1991-92. Her work is represented in Provincetown at DNA Gallery (on whose website an earlier version of this essay first appeared) and in Boston at Creiger-Daue Gallery. She teaches at Mountserrat College of Art in Beverly, Massachusetts.

S H A M E

In memory of Susan Kimball Laws

My friend has been dead for seven weeks. The first week I spent sleeping in her bed, the candle on the altar she'd made in her last month casting small light on the photos of her that lined the olive walls of the room. It should be said that I'd wanted to sleep somewhere else, in the cottage behind her house where my other friends lived, on a foldout bed covered in wool blankets whose weight would feel insistent, as if it alone could press one into sleep. But I did not go there; my dead friend's lover is my best friend, and she asked me to spend the long nights with her in a voice I have come over the years to understand signifies pleading. We stayed up late, people filtering through the house like a steady, respectful river, bringing food, filling the place with so many flowers the floor grew treacherous with heavy florist's vases, the air thick with the scent of lilies and red roses sent regularly by my best friend's karate students. Another friend who had come with me to California spent her afternoons rearranging the flowers. "They shouldn't look so somber," she said, and for days there were glasses and mugs full of showy blooms on the windowsills, the trash full of unwanted baby's breath and fern. This friend is another of my best, and when I put her on a plane to go home, I felt a chill enter my body in the place where she had been. I thought of her often when I lay in our dead friend's bed trying to sleep, I pictured her at home with her lover performing the tasks of their daily life: answering the phone, scolding their unappeasable dog for barking at the people who came to visit.

On the fourth night I took the photos down.

By the time we saw our dead friend again, she'd been gone for exactly a week. We went to the interment center in quiet order by car, my best friend, my dead friend's brother, some old friends from the area, a Buddhist priest, and myself, carrying the few artifacts that had come to symbolize her to us in front of our bodies like offerings. Like a Western version of the funeral procession I'd watched in Indonesia, women with elaborate stands of fruit on their heads, men with drums and symbols, the tassled bier swathed in bright cloths, an outsized portrait of the dead on top. I'd feared the smell when the flames came up, but what I remember is the rain in the trees that day, a flock of red tourist umbrellas in the open place near the fire, their native guide explaining in weary tones what the Balinese believed was happening. We thought it was funny that so many tourists had come to stand in the mud to watch, flocks of white ducks oblivious in the shocking green paddies on either side. The heat pressed in on us like too many children. We grew very wet. The flame smouldered in the rain like some latent rage until the men of the procession doused it with fuel, sending a black and orange plume into the sky.



TOUCHED

"He must not have wanted to go," my lover said. "He's already gone," I said back.

Our day was gray, a fine drizzle accompanying us into the quiet hall. None of us had slept. The room where our friend was laid out was quiet, neutral, a single skylight casting a dim, kind sheen on the place. I sat on a bench, one arm around my dead friend's brother, who was by that time weeping. My best friend resolutely approached the body, which lay in a simple box and swaddled in white cloths like a baby, her face exposed. My best friend was wearing a red Chinese silk jacket and when she reached out and began touching her lover's body, unafraid to claim it, she looked so beautiful and confident to me, as if over night she'd entered a new vocation, One Who Inters the Beloved, even though she'd begun whispering from somewhere high in her throat, saying her lover's name over and over like a mantra, eyes fixed on the dead woman's face, desperate to call her back, to be heard. She patted the face, stroked the arms and the short hair. She gave the body gifts to take with it when it went: a photo, a bracelet, a statue. I hadn't seen my dead friend in a year, and when I was ready to look, I was struck not so much by the stillness of her eyes or the way her jaw seemed to have settled into a kind of resolute slackness, but by the dark color of her lashes, how they stood out like caterpillars on her cheeks, the most animate thing in the box in which she lay.

MELANIE BRAVERMAN: "I BEGAN MAKING THESE SHIFTS A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO. I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THEY WERE TO ME WHEN I BEGAN, BUT NOW THEY SEEM LIKE THE EMBODIMENT OF MY GRIEF FOR THE DEVASTATED CHILD MY DEAD FRIEND WAS."

I sat back down on the bench. My dead friend's brother read a passage from the Bible silently to himself. The Buddhist priest began a chant in English that did not sound beautiful to me. Then there was nothing else to do. The man from the interment center entered the room with an assistant, a young woman with thick, dark hair. They released the wheels of the gurney the body was on and wheeled it toward a door I hadn't until that moment noticed. We followed behind. The door swung open to a concrete room. An enormous furnace stood in the middle of the floor. Foundry, I thought. A loud industrial sound engulfed us all. The steel doors of the furnace parted from the middle, its inside glowing orange as the fluid vapor of the sun. We stood at a distance and watched as our friend's body entered the flames, head first, and then the doors closed, and she was gone. Afterward, the group went walking in a place that had been a favorite of our dead friend, and I went back to the house to make a meal from the food that had been left, vegetables and rice and chicken passed among us, awkward as people on first dates, each aware of our own burning visibility.

The brother left for home that afternoon, never to be seen again. The local friends returned to their daily lives. I stayed for a few more days, then flew home on a night flight to arrive in my own town bleary-eyed on a cold morning, relieved to remember that my world was full of concrete problems to solve, food to buy, dresses to sew for the new year. My best friend followed a few days later and remains lodged in my small house, more or less bereaved in the mornings, keeping candles lit all day and night, her work a cultivation of the past. What it means to enter the present is the acknowledgement of loss.

Yesterday was the first I'd had alone in many weeks. I was sitting on the daybed looking out at the sky, when I noticed a furry caterpillar inching its way along the hem of a quilt. I considered putting the caterpillar in a jar, feeding it leaves, giving it to my friend to keep. I wish I could say that I'd thought what it might turn into, the kind of dramatic moth it might be. I wish I could say I had thought of it trying its new wings in a jar in my house while outside winter had begun to rage. But I didn't think at all. I urged the caterpillar onto a piece of paper and carried it outside. I knew it would probably die but I let it go.

Melanie Braverman is the author of a novel, East Justice (Permanent Press, 1996), and a collection of poems, Lamentations, Benedictions, and Indiscretions. She is Programs Administrator at the Fine Arts Work Center, and shows visual work at the Schoolhouse Center.

With No Land in Sight

PETER ALSON

A writer is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.

—THOMAS MANN

I READ *THE SUN ALSO RISES* on a train ride to Yugo-slavia in the summer of my seventeenth year. It was the first time I felt like I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I was in love with an American girl who had warned me not to go see her, but, with a sense of righteous doom I thought Jake Barnes might understand, I was going anyway.

A year later, as a college freshman, I attempted to turn the heartache of that adventure into a novel. I got about thirty or forty pages into the writing, then lost steam. There was nothing I wanted more in the world than to write a novel, but I was too self-critical for my own good. The burst of energy with which I began the book imploded from the negative force of my own expectations.

This was to happen to me again and again over the years with such neurotic and depressing regularity, that by the time I was thirty-seven, I had sworn off writing entirely and fallen into a life as a bookie. Therein, of course, lies a story, and even before the night the cops raided our office and I was arrested, I was beginning to make notes, with the telling of that story in mind.

My eventual night and a half in the Brooklyn House of Detention persuaded me to retire from bookmaking. It also persuaded me to give book writing one more shot. I knew two things going in. The first was that I would die if I failed again; the second was that if I did what I had always done up until then, I would almost certainly fail.

What I had always done up until then was this: at some point in the writing process, I would start to question the story and go back to the beginning to see where I had gone wrong. Then I would begin fixing things. There was something circular to the compulsion, a snake eating its own tail. But I couldn't stop myself. I spent six years of my life on one novel, wrote and rewrote hundreds of pages, and never got to the end. I was approaching middle age with options narrowed. I had worked as a waiter, proofreader, repo man, and bookie. My degree in English from Harvard qualified me for nothing. If I began another book and repeated the old pattern—well, it wasn't a prospect I wanted to consider.

So I made a deal with myself. I would start writing and I would never look back. No matter what happened, how bad I felt, how lonely, how afraid, I would keep going forward. My finances were sufficient to last me for a little while; I had managed to stash \$8,000 away while booking bets, all



PAT DE GROOT, *BIG WIND, ONCOMING STORM*, 2000

in cash. One definition of insanity is someone who keeps doing the same thing over and over, each time expecting a different result. Was I insane? There was only one way to find out.

When I began the book I was living in a tiny one-bedroom on a tree-lined street in Brooklyn Heights. Each morning, I would wake at nine, go through my ablutions, then walk around the corner to the Muslim-run variety store for the morning paper, usually the *Post* or the *News*, rarely the bulkier, more time-consuming *Times*. I am not a coffee drinker, nor a breakfast person, so I would sit at my desk, read the sports pages, and by 10:30 or eleven, take a deep breath, put the paper down, and open my laptop.

At first, my process was to consult my notes to see what they inspired. I had about thirty legal pad pages worth of notes, plus assorted random thoughts and snatches of dialogue written on old betting slips. The notes were a comfort; they made me feel less alone in front of the blank blue computer screen. I can remember on one scrap of paper I had jotted down: "Dapper Dan would leave in the middle of a poker game to get more money, but instead of going to a cash machine he would go out and stick up a 7-11. Then he would return to the game. One night he didn't come back. We discovered the cops had nailed him." Though I didn't wind up using that particular bit in the book, it was typical of the kind of stuff I had recorded.

Each morning when I opened the laptop and turned it on, I allowed myself to read one paragraph back—that was all—no matter how I felt, how much I thought it might benefit me to read back a bit further. To make temptation more difficult, I wrote short chapters and saved each chapter on a separate computer file.

The narrative of the book, I realize now, was not simple; there were a number of different plot strands that I was weaving together. But because the story was told in the first person, and in chronological sequence, I fooled myself into believing that it was simple. This was a necessary self-deception. I was a headcase and knew it, and like the coach of a talented but schizo ball player, I

was using every cheap psychological trick I could think of to prevent the player (who happened to be me) from having a meltdown.

My work habits were nonetheless atrocious. I am not one of those people with free flow; I am a bleeder, squeezing each word out with difficulty, and I could not sit at my desk for more than fifteen minutes without having to get up. I needed relief too badly. So I made trips to the bathroom, the refrigerator, the phone, the dictionary and the mailbox downstairs; not to speak of the supermarket, the drugstore, the library and the post office. I could use the copout that I am a child of television, conditioned by commercial breaks, but who really knows? For a while, I tried tying myself to my chair with the terrycloth belt of my bathrobe. Finally I stopped fighting it. The only truly important thing was that I keep going forward.

Three and a half months into the writing, I had my first real crisis. By then I had somehow accumulated a hundred pages. I had also exhausted my notes, and was having to face the empty screen without props. Also money was running out. I can't remember what prompted the episode, maybe I just woke up flat on that particular day and sat down feeling low and vulnerable. Maybe the lack of feedback, the isolation, finally caught up to me. But for the first time, in a profound way, I doubted what I was doing. The compulsion to go back and look at what I'd written, to see if it was worth anything, was overpowering. In such a mood, I was capable of tearing things down, of doing terrible destruction.

I began to think of how I'd begun the book and I suddenly knew what it was missing, what I could do to improve it. The old thought processes started up like a cold engine, coughing a few times, then rumbling fully back to life. If I didn't go back and fix the beginning now, I'd never be able to. The pull was just like the pull of an addiction. I almost gave in. Instead, my heart beating, I got up from the desk, went outside and took a long walk on the Brooklyn Heights promenade. Across the East River, Manhattan was hazy in the summer heat. "You made yourself a promise," I said aloud. "You have to keep that promise no matter what. You have to." People on the benches facing the river looked at me as I continued to mumble out loud my words of self-encouragement—another crazy soul who was not locked up (or at least hadn't been for several months).

I went back to my computer. It didn't matter whether the book was any good, I told myself; what mattered was that I finish it. Anything that needed to be fixed I could fix later. That day I began jotting down in a notebook the thoughts I had about what changes I might want to make after I'd finished the first draft. But the crucial point was: after.

The money problem was another matter. I didn't want to get a job, didn't want to break my work routine. I asked Eddie, one of my former business associates, for a loan, but he turned me down. The bookie office had opened up again after the bust and he asked me to come back. But I told him I couldn't go. I said, "Instead of a loan, how about staking me in the no-limit poker game at the Mayfair Club?" The Mayfair was a poker club in

Manhattan in the East 20s. I had played there a number of times, and I thought I could make money in the big game if I had a stake. Eddie said he'd have to watch me play first.

So he went with me one night and we both played in the game on his money. At the end of the night, he had lost a thousand, but I had won \$2,800. He said, "Okay, that's your stake. We'll leave the money on account here. Whatever you win, I get half."

After that, I began playing at the Mayfair three or four times a week. I would go in at eight or nine at night, play until they closed at four in the morning, then cab home to Brooklyn and sleep in until eleven or noon.

My writing routine remained the same, if on a slightly different clock. I usually got down to work after lunch, which, now that I was again flush with cash, I ate out at a local diner. At 1:30 or two, I would go back to the apartment, and keep writing in my usual fits and starts until I left for the club or for the occasional evening out on the town (New York is a great place when you have a pocket full of hundred dollar bills). My writing pace slowed, but I was enjoying myself. I felt like I had discovered a viable way to live. In three months, I wrote another seventy-five pages and made \$15,000 playing poker, of which I kept half.

Then I hit a bad streak.

I lost \$6,000 in two weeks. Sitting at my desk, I found myself thinking about poker hands I'd played the night before. At the poker table, I was worrying about whether I'd be able to finish the book. The perfect balance I'd maintained for months was gone. I needed to come up with another plan.

A good friend of mine, who happened to head up the East Coast development office of a big Hollywood producer, said that maybe I would like to let her take a look at what I had written so far. The notion made me very nervous. Then she found out that I had not even printed out the pages I had written up until then.

"Are you crazy?" she said. "Haven't you heard that computers crash? What kind of self-destructive idiot are you?"

It was a rhetorical question. She'd known me for years. I tried to justify myself anyway. "If I print it out, I'll be tempted to read it."

"Print it," she said. "And mail it to me. I'll keep it for you."

Grateful to have someone concerned and telling me what to do, I followed her orders.

Of course as I knew would happen, when she received the 175 pages in the mail, she asked me if she could read it. I was dying for some feedback, but said I didn't think it would be a good idea.

"Look," she said, "I have a confession to make. I already started reading it. I thought you'd say yes and ..." the pause between "and" and what followed was maybe a millisecond but it felt the way I imagine it feels after you hear the word "fire" and you're standing blindfolded in front of a firing squad.

"And it's good," she said. "Really good."

I tried to let that sink in. "You liked it?"

"I like it a lot."

"Really?" I felt my head get hot with tears. "How far—how much have you read?"

She cleared her throat, laughed, and said, "I actually stayed up until four in the morning. I read everything."

I forgave her immediately. How could I not? She had liked it! I wanted to hear more, and at the same time didn't want her to say anything that would take away from what she'd already said. The next morning she called me again. Would it be all right, she asked, if she showed it to her boss?

Looking back on all this, I suppose that bringing other people in while the book was still in progress was dangerous, even foolhardy of me. I might have been setting myself up, just in a different way than I had in the past. But after months and months of working in the dark, a certain dementia sets in, the way it does if you do anything alone for too long; it becomes difficult to trust your own judgment and you lose your place in the world—at least I do. In this case, however, I was lucky.

A week after my friend gave the pages to her boss, he said he wanted to meet me, and in the meeting he told me that he wanted to option my book for a movie. Again, I suppose this could have gone either way. Expectation might have crippled me. But for some reason it didn't. In fact, the opposite occurred. I wrote the next 150 pages in a month and a half. I was energized in a way I never had been before, eager to finish, barely able to sleep at night.

I have come, after all these years, to understand a few things about myself. But my writing process is still essentially a mystery to me. I know that faith is a big part of the picture, a necessary component for making something difficult work. Sometimes I think of writing a book, metaphorically, as being dropped into the middle of the ocean with no land in sight. There's only one real strategy, though it remains difficult for me to follow: pick a direction, start swimming, and never turn back.

Peter Alson is the author of the memoir Confessions of an Ivy League Bookie. His writing has appeared in many publications, including Playboy, Esquire, and George.

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Great Moments in **Neutrino** History

BETSY TERRELL

Summer 1988, Steps of Town Hall, Provincetown

It's a rag tag band—acoustic guitar, horns, a set of drums in a shopping cart—but we're a family. The two oldest children are dancing out front, a simple, old-fashioned dance to the tune of "Tea for Two." Suddenly the band breaks into an enthusiastic "Five Foot Two," and Todd tosses his hat in the air, letting out a war-whoop cheer as he and Ingrid launch into a wild Charleston. It's the show stopper, reserved for the climax of the set, and the regulars in the audience, mostly older Provincetown residents, greet the familiar number with applause and big grins. Many step up to make their customary contribution of a few coins or a dollar bill to the open case. Tourists, who have been blocking traffic along Commercial Street in order to view the impromptu outdoor performance, follow suit. This is a nightly ritual here in front of Town Hall, and the Flying Neutrinos are becoming something of a town institution.

By day, while living in tents and a converted bookmobile truck parked at the local campground, the whole family is resurrecting a condemned

What is a Neutrino?

Scientifically, neutrinos are subatomic particles that zap freely throughout the universe, invisible but ever-present. Although no one has ever seen one, scientists are certain they exist. The human soul or spirit is also something that most people claim never to have seen, and so think does not exist. Therefore, the neutrino is for us a symbol of all the unseen but nevertheless real parts of ourselves and the universe, which must be taken into account if we are to become whole and fully manifested. The Neutrino Movement is about getting free of all obstacles, internal and external, that block people from living their dreams.

Who are the Neutrinos?

David Pearlman, aka Poppa Neutrino, the patriarch and founder of the band; Betsy Terrell, co-founder; the Neutrino kids—Ingrid Lucia, Todd Londagin, Marisa Terrell, Esther Jo Armstrong, and Jessica Terrell; the crew of the *Son of Town Hall* on the Atlantic crossing—Ed Garry and Rodger Doncaster; Tim Johnson and Gretchen Baer, who built *Dragonfly's Banquet*, which now resides in the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge; and anyone struggling to be true to his or her deepest desires, and willing to go through fears and fog in order to live according to one's own script, is a Neutrino.

Neutrino Ideas

Triadic thinking proposes that three possibilities exist in any situation, or that three elements are necessary for the manifestation of any force. For example, the three elements necessary for a vessel to function on the water are: it must *float*, *go*, and *stop*. The three possibilities that exist in any situation for everyone are: *participate*, *redirect*, or *leave*. The seven levels are the seven chakras in Eastern philosophy. They are: the *instinctive*, which has to do with physical nurturing and well-being; the *sexual*; the *imitative*, which consists of everything learned through imitation, from talking and writing to high finance; the *emotional*; the *intellectual* (describing, comparing, and evaluating); the *higher emotional*, which is your spiritual self; and the *higher intellectual*, which has to do with cosmic consciousness.

docking barge, stuffing it with recycled foam and building cabins and paddlewheels from the remains of discarded dock floats. We put in an auction bid of one dollar on the old generator in the basement of the Town Hall, and win the power plant to run our paddlewheels. In honor of Provincetown, we call our raft the *Town Hall*. This will be home to us, and also to our adopted Mexican family, whom we met the previous winter while performing with a Mexican circus. We plan a world-traveling showboat and school. All the Neutrino children are being home educated, so why not just expand it to include the Mexican family, and others we meet along the way?



TOWN HALL UNDER CONSTRUCTION, 1988 PHOTO: BEATA COOK

The Town Hall eventually made her way to New York City, where an official Coast Guard order declared her "manifestly unsafe," and put an end to her voyage. Undaunted, we started over. If the Coast Guard considered the Town Hall not seaworthy, we would design and build a totally new raft that would be truly ocean-going—self-righting, sail-powered, self-steering in storms. Taking a few odd pieces from the Town Hall, along with logs from the Hudson River, and scrap from the streets and dumpsters of the city, we built the Son of Town Hall. Meanwhile, the kids grew, and Ingrid, with Todd, took over the band, playing to packed clubs in New York, Atlantic City, Las Vegas, and even Europe. After releasing their first album, produced by Poppa, they landed a record deal.

We established the Mexican family in a small border town, where they acquired a piece of land and built a house with financial help from us and many of our fans. All the children made steady progress through school. Although satisfied that we had helped this one family, we were increasingly appalled at stories we read and saw on PBS about small children enslaved as carpet makers in India and Pakistan, and orphans shot in the streets in Brazil. Our original dream of a showboat-school raft gradually expanded to the idea of an ocean-traveling orphanage for street children from third world countries. In the spring of 1995, after a major investigation by the Coast Guard that resulted in a report lauding our highly practical, though unconventional, construction methods, we left New York on the Son of Town Hall, headed for Provincetown—a few modifications and fine-tuning, we figured, and we would be ready to set sail for Europe.

February, 1996, Cabral's Wharf, Provincetown

I look down over the wall, the wind driving the snow into my face. It is dark, and very hard to see, but I know something is terribly wrong. My heart beating faster, I call to David to hurry. He comes alongside and looks down. "Oh my God, she's flipped," he says. By now I have managed to make out the side of the raft, covered by a yellow and white circus tarp, and the little square holes of the windows now facing the sky. "She's on her side," I gasp, still in disbelief. We built this raft to be self-righting, and there she lies, floating on her side in the water. My mind is reeling. How on earth could this have happened? Were we really that totally oblivious to the reality of the forces of nature?

Over the next few days, as we make trips to the raft every daytime low tide to empty her of all



FLYING NEUTRINOS BAND, SUMMER 1988
PHOTOS: DONNA LONDAGIN

our family's worldly possessions, now hopelessly waterlogged, we piece together the elements that led to this disaster. Months of living in the raft without traveling, tied up at the foot of the pier, had lulled us into a landlubberly, lackadaisical attitude. Our acquisition of objects had grown, and everything was helter-skelter, nothing tied or battened as it would be for going to sea. Snow, wet and heavy, had accumulated on the roof. We knew that weight on the roof would cause the raft to be very tippy, and always kept all the weight low



DRAGONFLY'S BANQUET OFF THE MASSACHUSETTS COAST
PHOTO: AURELIA NEUTRINO

while at sea, but who would have thought of snow? As the raft listed a little, things inside slid across toward the low side, causing her to tip more. Then water sloshed in through the raft's sides, left open during construction, augmenting the tilt still more. A boat would have sunk, but the raft went on floating—just on her side instead of her bottom.

Although we have the help of our loyal friends and supporters, this incident is the last straw, as far as many locals are concerned. The newspapers display headlines like, "Ship of Fools," and "It's Time to Anchor the Floating Neutrinos," along with vivid photos of the pathetic beached whale of a raft. The harbor master appears on the beach the morning after the incident and curtly informs David he has twenty-four hours to get this mess all cleared out of here.

By the time the Coast Guard arrives for yet another inspection, we have emptied and righted the raft, and replaced the outriggers for extra stability. Bill McNulty, former Town Manager and a close friend, who is also trained as a marine architect, explains to the Coast Guard officers the strength of the construction and the not so obvious reasons behind its seemingly accidental elements. Lieutenant Doloff and David sit in the sand while David draws diagrams demonstrating the principles behind every aspect of the design. "True, we have a few more things to figure out," he says, "and we will not cross the Atlantic until we have them solved, but we still intend to take this raft around the world." In the end, the Coast Guard declines to stop our voyage, although they warn they will be keeping a close eye on us.

That spring and summer, as we sailed along the coasts of Massachusetts and Maine, and all through the following winter, frozen in the Maine cold, we wrestled with design flaws, made test runs, built models, tried

dozens of different plans, until finally we had all the problems solved. The following summer, after final test runs proved successful, we provisioned and set out to make the crossing. But luck was against us—in spite of the raft's brilliant performance in the few days of near-gale force winds, most of our forty days at sea were plagued by record calms. August found us off the coast of Newfoundland, too late in the season to go further. We left the raft there for the winter, returning the following spring to set out once more, enthusiastic and incredibly naïve about the thousands of miles of ocean, and the inner tests, that lay ahead.

August 13, 1998, Within Sight of Ireland

We are approaching the coast of Ireland. The Irish Coast Guard has come out to welcome and escort us into Castletownbere, which is inside a long inlet between jutting peninsulas of gently rolling green hills. It's an astonishingly beautiful sight after 60 days of nothing but sea and sky. I am sitting on the top deck and crying. They are tears of joy and relief and accomplishment against incredible odds; tears of overwhelming surprise as applause and cheers reach our ears from the dozens of small boats coming out to meet us. But they



SON OF TOWN HALL IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC, AUGUST 1998
PHOTO: AURELIA NEUTRINO

are also tears of sorrow, as I leave behind the open ocean and the rawness that comes from extended immersion in that isolated and bare-bones environment. It has been a deeply transforming passage, and not one of us will ever be the same. We have overcome storms at sea, made repairs underway, and gained tremendous confidence in the raft's abilities. None of us would hesitate to sail anywhere on earth aboard this vessel, whether the Northwest Passage, Cape Horn, or Antarctica. In the enormous emptiness of the seemingly endless ocean, we have each plumbed our own depths and found there strength, courage and joy. We have seen for ourselves what is possible when human creativity and ingenuity are pitted against the elements. And we are eager to share it with others.

Sometime in the Future

Under sunny tropical skies, driven along by a huge spread of patchwork sails, a 110-foot raft called the *Vilma B* makes her passage from South America toward India. Children's voices echo across the water as they run and play along her decks. Up on the bow, children practice musical instruments and sing under Poppa Neutrino's direction; at the stern, near the plankton catcher, a lesson in marine biology is underway; in the chartroom, a group works with the navigator to

figure out the day's noon sextant shot, comparing their calculated position with the satellite reading. The children are from many different countries, but have one thing in common: they are all from the streets, where they had survived without parents before choosing to come to the raft. Here they have space to heal and grow, and an opportunity to learn as they travel the world.

Meanwhile, the *Son of Town Hall* crosses the Atlantic for the third time. Having completed her circumnavigation when she traversed the longitude of Marseilles in the Mediterranean, she is now headed toward New York and then Provincetown to revisit the ports of her birth. Sailed by an all female crew, she is a training ship for young women with drugs and alcohol in their past. Here, counselors convey the skills they need to support themselves with an independent trade, to proceed proactively toward their deepest desires in life.

A third raft, *Absolute Absolution*, is commanded by Ed Garry, who made the first Atlantic crossing with us on *Son of Town Hall*. A trimaran, it is headed for Antarctica with a crew of adventurers, pursuing the dual paths of outer and inner exploration.

We envision a time in which Neutrino-inspired rafts are a common sight in every port and on every waterway of the world. If McDonald's can do it, why not the Neutrinos?

Betsy Terrell is a licensed captain who has been building rafts with Poppa Neutrino for twenty-five years. Together they raised and home-schooled five children, much of the time on scrap-built rafts. She plans to spend the rest of her life sailing rafts, teaching, and writing.

EDITOR'S NOTE: With regret, I must report that the latest development in the Neutrino story is not a happy one. According to Capt. Betsy, on May 8th, the Hudson River Park Trust, in an attempt to "re-locate" the *Town Hall* from its legal anchorage near Pier 25 in New York City, destroyed the raft when a towing strap snapped, spilling the shattered raft and the Neutrino's possessions into the Hudson. Another raft, *Child of Amazon*, was also moved. Its owner, who was refused the right to board and collect his belongings, lost his green card, his father's ashes, and his cat. Capt. Betsy says that the actions were taken on behalf of real estate interests, without warning or due process.

In an official Neutrino statement, Poppa Neutrino and Capt. Betsy, who were in Minnesota working on the *Vilma B* at the time of the incident, wrote, "The *Town Hall*, from its very inception, it seems, was destined eventually to fall victim to the bureaucrats." They reflected on the irony of a "symbol of creative recycling" that transformed "the debris of an overindustrialized society" into art, falling prey to a supposed clean-up effort. Noting that parts of the *Town Hall* were used in the building of the *Son of Town Hall* and the *Vilma B*, they quoted a Provincetown resident who once admitted, "It's too late to neuter the Neutrinos, they've already multiplied," and, with typical tenacity, they concluded, "Just try and stop us."

With Nothing but **Gratitude**

PAM HOUSTON

Nearly three years ago, I got pregnant, went crazy, lost the baby, and had my computer stolen, in that order, and all in a very short time. Then I went on a fifteen-day cruise through the Panama Canal with my then boyfriend (the baby's father) and my dad. It was the darkest, most terrifying four months of my adult life, and I still shudder to think how close I came to going under. It was as if the whole series of events was designed by some universal force bent on ending my denial and promoting major change—a kind of *This Is Your Life* for dysfunctionals. It wasn't simply that the force wanted to dissuade me from any false sense of security I might have been harboring; they wanted to detonate it like a neutron bomb.

Prior to my pregnancy, I had always existed around the edges of my occasional suicidal tendencies, which seemed in those days to be three parts despair and one part melodrama, a weather pattern I could step into and out of without ever really getting wet. If I was still asking the question *Am I suicidal?* I always thought it was a pretty safe bet that I wasn't. This time, though, the darkness set in immediately and stayed, and I was immobilized by it beyond questioning. I was adrift in a black sea under a black sky waiting for a black wave, the one bigger than all the others, that would suffocate me, annihilate me, finish me off.

After two months of terror so intense I stopped getting out of bed in the morning (most days, even in the afternoon), it occurred to me to get back into therapy. I was still pregnant then and surrounded by people who said, *Of course you won't kill yourself, you have another life inside you*, which made sense in theory, but in practice was another thing. My obstetrician said the same thing every time: *mood swings are common, hang in there till the second trimester*, but there wasn't any swinging involved in my long, slow descent, and making it to the end of the day had become too much of a challenge for me.

I had been in therapy before, brief stints of it when I was nursing a broken heart, or having a hard time making career decisions. Those episodes had been all about self-examination and self-improvement, not survival, and I often had the suspicion that those therapists were having a hard time keeping up with me. I had always been articulate and self-deceiving enough to convince them that I deserved their stamp of mental health after only a few weeks or months of work, and I was always set free by them, all the darkest places in me still left unexplored.

This time was different. This time I sat quietly in the office with my lungs empty of oxygen and my limbs exhausted beyond use. This time I was so uncomfortable in my own skin I couldn't have come up with a lie convincing enough to fool

anyone. With every breath I took I felt mild surprise that I was still alive.

Doctor L. had been recommended by a friend. He was exactly my age. Other than that, I knew nothing about him.

He looked at me across a hundred thousand miles of black water.

"Help me," I said, "save me, please."

And he took out his pad and pencil and said, "All right, I will."

I don't know how many hours we spent together that first day, but I know I talked for what seemed like forever, and then we went separately to lunch, and then I came back and talked forever again. I remember his pencil flying across the paper. I remember him drawing lines and circles and arrows like John Madden did on Monday Night Football. I remember being astonished at his ability to integrate everything I had thrown at him, the most random collage, his willingness to stay focused intently enough to take it all in.

By the end of that first day we had a plan about how to get through the next several. And though the work we would do together would demand more of me than I would have thought myself capable, and though we would uncover in those first few months a lion's share of grim details from a past I had mostly forgotten, once I started working with him there was never a single day that didn't feel at least a little better than all the days before.

I don't want to spend the words or the grief it would take to recount my personal history. Like all atrocities, the things that happened to me as a child were simultaneously profound and generic, and for that reason, as well as many others, I have not yet figured out how to tell that story on the page. And anyway, this is an essay about healing, not about the story that necessitated it. It is about the first person in thirty-seven years who gave me permission to tell my story, the first person who gave me permission to remember it, the first person who gave a voice to the girl who's always been drowning in that black sea.

I spent the first two months in therapy learning to trust Dr. L. enough to tell him the truth, at least the surface truth, at least what I thought the truth was before our work showed me that the truth was always a slippery thing. On the one hand this was easy. He was the only person available for trusting. He was the guy with the lifeline in his hand, but as he was quick to point out, I had made the choice against trust plenty of times before.

I have always thought of myself as a ridiculously confessional person, both in my life and in my work, but it didn't take long before I realized I was telling Dr. L. things I had never even thought to tell anyone, the stories I didn't even know I knew for certain, the stories no one could tell without being struck down dead.

Dr. L. presented himself with the perfect combination of intelligence and empathy; beneath that he had honesty and humor. I remember one day, early on, we were talking about the Tori Amos song, "Silent All These Years." I was saying how I had always related so much to that song, though I could never figure out why, since it seemed like

I'd done nothing but talk since the day I was born. "Right," he said, laughing, "you've been verbal all these years." We laugh a lot in that office, and about things you wouldn't even believe.

During our second session, we found out that we had both gotten perfect scores on the analytical portion of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), which explained why he was the first therapist I'd ever been to who could stay one step ahead of me. What impressed me most about him in those first few sessions was that he wasn't afraid to back up and revise an earlier opinion, he was always quick to own his own issues, and he'd always tell me when he thought he might have been wrong. He said, *One day I'll say something really stupid and you'll look at me and roll your eyes and that will be a difficult day for both of us*, and that has happened in three years, but not very often. Although I now know he is only four or five inches taller than I am, that whole first year I literally believed he was seven feet tall.

This is probably not the best time to write this essay. It is possible that I should wait until I'm no longer seeing Dr. L. and I can see the completed arc of our process together, until I'm not so consumed with fear about violating it, until I've remembered everything I'm going to remember about my past and decided exactly what relationship to truth these memories have. It is somewhat dishonest, I know, to try to keep separate the past from the healing, and perhaps later I won't feel that necessity. I fear dishonesty more than anything, and yet I understand that I am capable of it, even sometimes in Dr. L.'s office, even here on the page where I'm striving for truth with all my might.

After two months of working together, I was convinced I had never felt safer with anyone in my life, and Dr. L. was convinced I was a post-traumatic stress victim. For both of these reasons, he suggested that if I survived the Panama Canal cruise, upon my return, we should begin a therapeutic process of remembering called EMDR. In the seven days before the cruise, I lost both my baby and my computer, and you would have thought that would have given me pause, but out to sea I went like a lemming.

My father, my boyfriend, and I all slept in the same cabin—bed, bed, bed, like pigs in blankets—until the woman at guest services got a whiff of the tension and began, when she could, to slip me keys to vacant rooms. I spent the whole fifteen days in Ali's Rope-a-dope position, and came home a little high on my own survival and ready for anything; it might as well be EMDR.

EMDR stands for eye movement desensitization and reprocessing. It is practiced by therapists in lieu of hypnotism or in addition to more traditional talk therapy, and I'll try to explain it the way it was explained to me.

There was a therapist at Stanford University named Francine Shapiro, who found herself feeling weighted down by the anxiety her patients were unloading on her. She went for a walk outside her office building, and spotted two birds chasing each other between a tree and a telephone pole. As she watched them, she was in tune enough with her psyche to realize that her anxiety was lifting; the

onger she watched the movement of the birds, the better she started to feel.

This made her think of REM sleep, and how in dreams, which are brought on by rapid eye movement, our minds are given a chance to release our fears and anxieties. In dreams we process all the traumas, great and small, that we are not able to cope with as they are happening to us in the course of our week or day. She recalled the research that indicated that patients who are deprived of REM sleep go crazy in a matter of weeks, even if they have been allowed to sleep without dreaming. She hypothesized that if rapid eye movement could be re-created in a therapeutic environment with a post-traumatic stress victim who is lucid and awake, it might allow the brain to release memories that had not been previously available in the same way that dream images are released in sleep.

It wasn't too long after that that EMDR was born. In the beginning the therapist achieved the desired effect by moving her hand back and forth in front of the patient's face and instructing the patient to follow her. Some years later an entrepreneur invented a light bar the patient could sit on and watch. By the time I was ready to try EMDR, doctors understood that the brain relinquishes its locked memories with any type of rapidly alternating right brain/left brain stimulation. I use headphones, a system as nonintrusive as a Walkman, with a simple one-pitch tone in each ear.

Francine Shapiro believed that the psyche, like the skin or the bones, can knit and heal if the conditions are made ripe for healing. More important, even, than remembering the trauma, is the reprocessing part of the equation. Once the trauma is set free from that enlarged and isolated place in the brain, all our adult coping skills can be brought to bear upon it. The remembered event stops being a monster under the bed and starts being what it is, something bad that happened a very long time ago.

I was terrified the first day I tried EMDR, not because of what I thought I might find lurking in my mind's recesses, but because of what I feared I might not. Dr. L. was fairly sure my trauma history was going to turn out to be ugly and extensive, and I didn't want to let his hypothesis down. By that time the combination of how much help I needed, how analytically able I was, how dedicated I was to my own survival, and how engaging a story I could tell had made me one of Dr. L.'s most valued patients, or at least that's what I needed to tell myself at the time.

I had visions of myself putting on the headphones, hearing the tones, and remembering nothing, Dr. L. waiting and waiting for some glimmer of trauma to flash across my face, and then finally, sadly, shaking his head. I would be an EMDR failure, I feared, someone who spent her life swimming in and out of the big black ocean just because she was too stupid to stay on land like everybody else. *She's melodramatic*, the everpresent critic in my head said, *she's a writer. We've always known she's been over the top.*

With all that noise going on in my brain, it's a wonder I could hear the tones inside the machine at all, but it wasn't two full minutes into the process before the images started coming. It was not

unlike pushing a movie into a VCR, the slight delay and then the film's initial images, not coherent or chronological at first, but eerily precise, a dark and experimental tale filmed by some nihilist director and a cameraman with a love for the wide-angle lens. There were my mother's tulips, there were the tiny white stones that covered the log-landscaped steps down the back of a house I would have said, had I been asked, that I didn't remember. There was the clothes dryer where I hid from the mayhem. There was the oak tree the cat always climbed when the fur started flying inside.

The images came back, one at time, eventually enough of them to form scenes and stories, more and more of them throughout that whole summer, some of them more gruesome than it would have been possible for me to imagine, some of them sweet and quiet and strangely light.

In the beginning I would tell Dr. L. about each image as it crossed my interior field of vision. As we got better together he would wait until I had stories and scenes. We isolated three ages on which to focus, five, eight, and twelve, and three girls sprang to life out of these sessions and became so real to me that Dr. L. said he was the only therapist he knew who was trying to cure a patient of post-traumatic stress syndrome by giving her multiple personality disorder.

The five-year-old was the most accessible, the toughest, in a way, because she had not yet lost her hope, and she became our best source of information. The eight-year-old wouldn't come out of the dark for months, until I finally employed a tactic to get to her that I use in writing. I found a metaphor: horses, the thing she loved best, and we started with horse memories, drew her out with those, and worked our way back from there. The twelve-year-old is still mostly hiding, though she comes to me in moments. I haven't yet discovered the metaphor that unlocks her door.

The whole EMDR process is, in fact, so much like writing that for a while I got the two confused. When I write a story I start, almost always, with an image: a horse that wrapped his big neck around to eat green figs out of my hands, or the way the lines under the eyes of the man I love grow at once deeper and softer when he makes love to me right at dawn. I believe if I write the image truly enough, the meaning of the scene will rise up and out of it, will distill itself organically, and the story will be truer than anything I could write another way. It is the image, I believe, that knows the truth of the story, and if I have faith in it, it will lead me away from all the smoke and noise my conscious brain tries to use to control it, and deep into the heart of the story I'm trying to tell.

In EMDR, too, the images that lead me into the corners of my brain hold all the secrets, hold all the terror and pain. Like any monster under the bed, when they are brought to the light they lose some of their power, and become known, not by their reputation, but by their often diminished truth.

If writing is about taking the details that have been overlooked, and recognizing them for their profoundness, then EMDR is about taking the details that have been made too much of, and releasing them to a manageable size. In writing we try

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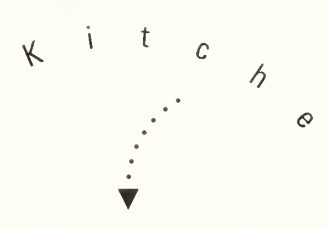
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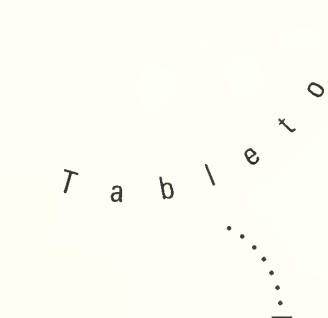
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to find the truth that will make a story last forever, in EMDR we try to find the truth that will allow us to let a story go.

Until I did this work I always thought denial meant that you know, but you pretend not to. With EMDR I learned that it's really slightly more complicated, you really *don't* know, until you do, and that's when you realize that part of you always did.

When I would get a memory, especially if it was a particularly grisly one, I would tell Dr. L. about it, and we would revisit it again and again from every possible viewpoint. First I'd be the little girl and then I'd be an observer. Eventually I'd be myself grown up, the observer again, but big and strong enough to step in. You can see, again, how this is like writing. I would revisit the scene from various narrative positions: first person past tense, first person present, third person limited, third person omniscient, everything from Nick Carraway's remove to Stephen Dedalus' immediacy, we'd rewrite the scene using every trick in the book.

When it was over there was sadness, sometimes shock, but no longer terror. I was a grownup. I could step in. I could save that little girl.

In time I came to understand that the right brain/left brain stimulation does more than just throw one image up at a time, though that is often the only way my brain can translate it. But sometimes, if I let it happen, I get a glimpse of my entire memory bank and how it all fits together. Sometimes I see a whole cross section of my consciousness, a layer-cake microchip kind of thing that I could have access to all at once if only I were smart enough. One day the chip handed me the entire 1980 Philadelphia Phillies roster, even the relief pitchers, and as far as I knew I hadn't asked.

I know it sounds simplistic, perhaps even moronic, but that summer, with the help of Dr. L. and EMDR, I learned to tell the difference between what felt good and what felt bad. It was not a distinction that I had previously been capable of, and once I was capable of it, it was the most profound experience of my life.

The girls—my five- eight- and twelve-year-old—went with me everywhere and helped me make decisions that would keep me moving toward the good things, and moving away from the bad. In between EMDR sessions, Dr. L. and I continued what I would call present-centered talk therapy, but when I was having some trouble resolving an issue, he would say, *Why don't you put the headphones on and ask the girls?* and I would.

We used EMDR differently those days, as a tool to open up, not the memory exactly, but the imagination. We were talking one day about some trouble I was having with a friend in my life who had become a mother figure and I found myself wondering, if my mother hadn't died several years before, would I have confronted her with the memories that the EMDR had restored?

Why don't you do that, Dr. L. said, go have a talk with her and see if any of the girls want to go along?

I put the headphones on and asked them. At first, they all said no, but eventually the five-year-old relented. She said she'd come, but she wasn't

going to say anything. She was just going to sit in her chair and watch what happened with her arms tightly folded over her chest.

My mother was my "good parent" and I seem to be married to that notion of her more than Dr. L. approves of, and more than the girls can tolerate. They are always skeptical when I propose a visit to her.

I called the meeting to take place in the last kitchen she had before she died. It was a house I had never lived in, so I figured we'd both feel pretty safe in it for different reasons. The five-year-old sat down at the kitchen table and I sat down next to her. We waited for my mother to settle in, but she kept shape-shifting into a big dark bird, a raptor of some kind—first an owl, then a hawk, and making big loops around the open kitchen/dining/living room. The little girl and I exchanged glances. *Give her time to settle in, she seemed to say, she's even more nervous than us.*

Eventually, she settled in, turned back into a woman, and I started talking, telling her the memories one at a time, starting with the most benign and working toward the most awful. My mother's face was set in the smile she reserved for my father and the camera. She was smiling too much and too steadily, and after a while the five-year-old reached over and pulled her face off and it turned out to be a mask, a Screen Actors Guild happy face in the image of my mother.

The five-year-old and I stared a long time at what was behind the mask. My mother was made of stone, her face had no features, just indentations for the eyes and mouth and nostrils. The five-year-old stood up and walked around the statue a few times and then, in a gesture neither playful nor violent, she toppled it out of the chair and onto the floor. It broke into several pieces, and to each piece she tied a balloon strong enough to lift the stone out the open kitchen window and into the sky.

You can see how EMDR is like dreams, and yet again you can see how much it is like writing. More than either of these, it is like a miracle, and the day we tied balloons to my mother was just one of many days when I could feel myself getting better, one of the days when the girls and I left the office on the same page. Anyone who deals in miracles knows that one often leads directly to another, and it wasn't long before the next one. I'd be out in the real world, days or weeks from my last session, and I would find myself choosing the thing that would make me happy without forethought or hesitation, making the choice a whole person would make, without having to wrench my mind around 180 degrees.

Every writer knows that memory is a liar, that truth is a sketchy thing that only exists in metaphor, when it exists at all. When my then-boyfriend wore my father's clothes on the cruise, I knew it meant that eventually he would leave me. When I saw the particular curve of the lines under my new love's eyes, I hoped it meant that he would not. When I saw my mother's face turn to stone behind my closed eyes in Dr. L.'s office, I knew more about her than I ever did while she was

living. This is a writer's process, and I believe in it with everything I am.

Until three years ago I had almost no memories of my childhood. Now I have hundreds, but I'm afraid to say to anyone but Dr. L. what they are. I still can't say I'm perfectly clear about how much of it all really happened. I understand that this is part of the way my sickness protects me. If I didn't have denial in my childhood, Dr. L. has told me, I'd likely already be dead.

One day after bringing to light a particularly brutal scene, I was shaking my head in disbelief and Dr. L. said, *See if you can understand this: whether or not it really happened is less important than the fact that this is the way you remember it. Whether or not this really happened has very little to do with whether or not it is true.*

Could I understand this? I thought, *is he kidding?* I thought of all the writing students over the years to whom I had said those exact words. I thought of how there couldn't be two other sentences that more precisely described the place I live in my head.

Dr. L. and I are well into our third year of work together, and our relationship continues to grow, though it has not always looked like a textbook case. He has been willing to see me at all hours, because of my erratic schedule (I think 6 a.m. Sunday morning before I flew to Patagonia was the most generous), and he's been understanding when I can see him three times in one week and then not at all for the next four. He's come to my rescue by telephone many times: once in France when he talked me and seven of my writing students through a kind of intervention, because the eighth student stopped taking her medication and became dangerous to herself and to all of us; more than once ship-to-shore when things got dicey in the Panama Canal; and once from the downtown Denver Post Office, on the night the boyfriend who'd worn my father's clothes broke up with me in the middle of a fifty-city publicity tour when I barely had enough energy in reserve to dial Dr. L.'s number. He compromised his boundaries once to go to a reading of mine at a local bookstore and that night gave me a rock from his office waterfall that I still carry. And I may have compromised him further by dedicating the book I could never have written without our work to him. Several months after that, I was sitting in his waiting room and overheard him say he hoped I didn't show up because he wanted to go running, and I almost snuck out forever without being seen, but he caught me with my hand on the door and turned the next two hours into maybe our finest session of all. He was the only person in my life who didn't say it was too soon when I met the man with the soft and deep eyes.

Above all, Dr. L. has shown me that I don't have to be afraid of my sadness. He has shown me that every time I act on my own behalf it makes me feel good. He tells me that I have never been in a better position to feel worthy of another person's love, and all but the very darkest places in me believe him. I have come to believe that he cares for me in a way that leaves me feeling nothing but safe and protected. I have come to believe that healing is impossible in the absence of that kind of love.

I am fighting the urge now to write a sentence assuring you that Dr. L. gets something out of our

relationship, too, that I regale him with stories that delight him, that I have such an astounding ratio of breakthroughs per visit that I make him feel like he's made the right career choice, that our perfect-GRE-score minds link up so well that our sessions must at least sometimes be as much fun for him as they are for me. If Dr. L. were here, he would be quick to point out that this is one of the reasons I'm still in therapy, that I can't simply accept somebody's care and kindness without trying to balance the equation. He might also tell you that my need to perform for him, my need to find the right answer and get a gold therapy star, has kept our work, so far, from achieving all that it might. I have been more honest with Dr. L. than I ever have been with anyone, but I am still capable of lies of omission, I am still capable of trying to fool him with all the lies I tell myself.

But really, if he were here, he likely wouldn't tell you anything, because that's the rule of confidentiality, a rule I feel I've broken, even though I'm not sure it does or should apply to me. I'm still very much in this process, too close to have any perspective, too invested not to be overprotective, and yet the need to honor it, to honor him, to honor myself and all the courage on every side this process requires, led me to believe I should try to write this piece.

When our therapeutic relationship ends, if it ends, I will no doubt write a better essay. It will be filled with the things that make an essay good, the elegance of retrospect, the structural confidence that comes with a broader view. This essay is haphazard, born of nothing but gratitude, for a man and a process that has allowed me to be so much more fully alive than I could have dreamed.

The black waves are not gone entirely; they can still be called up when I feel particularly threatened, as they were just this morning, when I realized that for the first time since I've known my own history, I might be really, truly, deeply in love. I take solace in the hope that given all that Dr. L. has taught me, I am making what he would call *proactive, self caring* choices. I take solace in my newfound ability to distinguish the good relationships from the bad. More than any of this I take solace in the fact that love is terrifying no matter how good the choices, and I am a whole enough person now to step into the bright light of that terror, to understand the potential for loss and to take the risk willingly, to know that straight through the terror is the only path to the joy. The lines under my lover's eyes tell me that he knows all this and will soon show me more. I feel Dr. L. standing behind me, nudging me gently into the light.

Pam Houston is the author of two collections of stories, Cowboys Are My Weakness and Waltzing the Cat (both Washington Square Press), and a memoir, A Little More about Me (WW Norton). She teaches at the Fine Arts Work Center each summer, and calls Provincetown her "second favorite place on earth."

This essay is from Tales from the Couch: Writers on the Talking Cure, edited by Jason Shinder and forthcoming in December 2000 from HarperCollins. Reprinted by permission.

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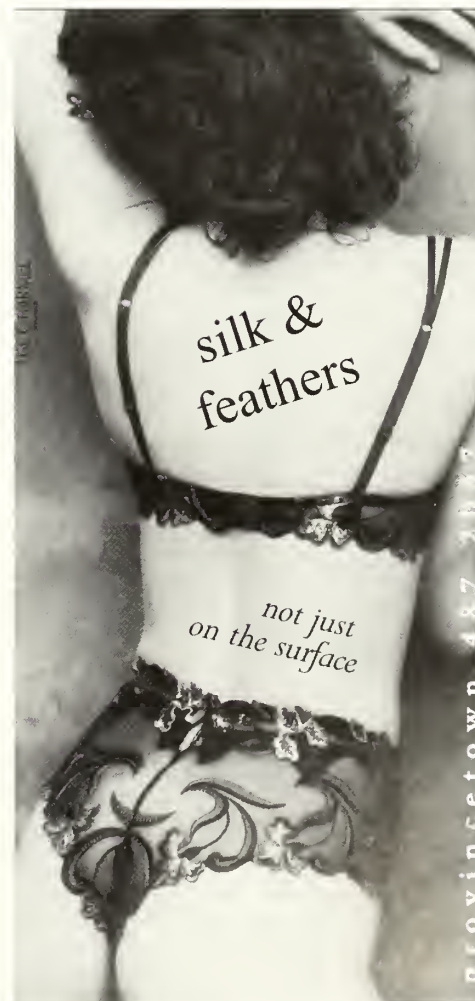
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CHRISTOPHER BUSA

Eyeballing the Alien: The Mythic Quest of Tim McCarthy

1. Mr. Nuclear Missile Technician

His look is lean and hungry. Fit and quick, muscles bulging in a white T-shirt, veins in neck throbbing, he is a warrior poet pausing to discuss his mission. Above his right eye, a silver piercing looks like an eyebrow ready for plucking. His voice, fast and controlled, changes at will, becoming slow, quiet, loud—as needed to make his point. Sometimes his passion overtakes his pacing, and he suddenly brakes to whisper an essential thought.

"I was a nuclear missile technician in the Army in Florida, part of the air defense artillery aimed at Cuba, using nuclear weapons designed to blow squadrons of planes out of the air. I'm a Cold War baby. The long and short of it is simply the logic of our world: it's them or us. The same logic of the Cold War permeated our medical system, because the mentality is inherent in our culture. But I don't believe our weapons beat the Soviets—it was our



the present and for history in the future—"recording today as the past for tomorrow" as he says. He would provide no oversound, no lights, no scripts, no props. He would let what is, be—being, not becoming. Big difference, being is: since 1990, McCarthy has shot over 3,500 hours of video, documenting the worldwide community that is, by turn, helping him stay alive. He knows this reciprocity is important.

Seven years ago McCarthy left Washington, D.C., where he

was an entrepreneur in the computer software business, and bought a house in Provincetown. American physicians had given him six months to live, but they were failed witch doctors. It was only after he realized that he was surviving, living in fact, that McCarthy became angry with those who uttered his death

sentence. He suspected his doctors were not happy that he failed to disappear as predicted. "My government cast a spell on me and told me I should die. They may not have created the virus, but they created the pandemic by the insolent idea that some portion of the population must die. That made the fire spread." He recognizes the power of the "nocebo" effect, the opposite of the placebo effect—when death is prophesied, it will come.

In the winter of 1998-99, McCarthy set out to record a trip to Uganda, seeking both to experience something transcendental toward his own healing, and to visit the apparent origin of HIV. He uttered a prayer: "I must go to Africa. It is dangerous. I must go. May I return?" He got on a jet plane with Timothy XX Burton, writer and Radical Faerie, and Peter Lien, photographer and fellow fairy, and landed the next day near a lake in Kenya, close to the equator. In their first encounters with locals, through an interpreter, they "came out" as gay men, charming everyone but a homophobic African Catholic priest, who quoted the Bible to damn McCarthy.

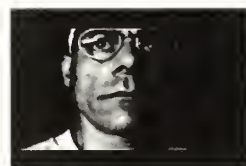
2. Into the Inferno

McCarthy's goal is to enter Kitum Cave. Two thousand feet above sea level, the hottest cave in Kenya, it bakes inside the oven of an extinct

volcano. Robert Preston claims in his book, *The Hot Zone*, that the cave is the most biologically dangerous place on the planet. McCarthy climbs the steep path to the summit, walking through the powdery dried dung of bats and elephants. In view of the entrance to the cave, the audio of McCarthy's camera picks up his heavy panting. One can almost hear the altered thumping of his heart, as his narration becomes rapid, terse, obliged to be as essential as a telegraph message. McCarthy is both exhausted and invigorated. After a long march he has reached the pinnacle into which he must now burrow. Here, closer to the sun, the sun doesn't shine. Under the tropical colors and giddy noise of jungle, the cave waits, surely as lush as the mythical Garden of Eden.

Walking through the cave, there is no sight, only the sound of water falling hard, echoing in the vast chamber. McCarthy trains his camera on the bit of light that shines on his boots, as they sink into a cloud of dehydrated muck. Twilight becomes darkness and then comes the beating of the wings of thousands of bats. Now the light

dims. McCarthy turns the lens on himself, and for five seconds he offers us this self-portrait: his eyes haunted and rapt, his ears pointed, alert to the sound of the camera



functioning. Here, McCarthy's personal quest is sewn into the fabric of the mythic, the way bats sew the night and day together. He enters the very spirit of his story, like a guest.

3. Contemporary Garden of Eden, January 1999 Six hundred miles west of Kitum Cave is Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, so-called for the density of its jungle. McCarthy believes the plague began here when it made the jump between species, from chimp to man. He was influenced by Lauri Garrett's book, *The Coming Plague*, which won the Pulitzer Prize by tracing the steps that HIV took out of Africa. McCarthy came to understand that chimpanzees passed Simian Immune Virus to humans, and the new strain became HIV.

"We are in the zoo," McCarthy says, as a family of gorillas surrounds him and the crew. "We are



economy. And the body's economy is our immune system. It's not the virus! They want me to treat HIV like an enemy that must die. And, they say, I should kill it. Here they offer me a recipe for making the self less strong, the enemy stronger. When you attack a life form, those that survive are resistant to the attack. Looking at these other life forms, I realized I don't even digest my own food. E Coli does it. My cohabitant is a poison. So, common knowledge tells that cohabitation is entirely possible. If you build your immune system, you don't have to die from HIV. You don't die from HIV anyway. You die from opportunistic infections that take advantage of your weakened immunity. So: bolster your immunity. Since I was twenty-one, I have taken huge amounts of vitamins. And, always, regular exercise."

In 1988, diagnosed with HIV, McCarthy was told his days were finite. But months stretched into a season. Seasons became the sinews of multiple years. At a certain moment, never having touched a video camera before, McCarthy was invited to a Radical Faerie gathering in Tennessee. He went out and bought a camera and made an agreement with himself. He would use the camera to record lesbian and gay activism and culture for himself in



the alien species, being watched." Birds chirp and the gorillas are silent, watchful. The small ones, ever hungry, move up and down trees, finding fruit to eat. Of twenty-eight gorillas, two are males. These enormous gray Silverbacks are three cubic feet of solid muscle, with articulating limbs that extend like cranes at a metropolitan Big Dig. A guide keeps everyone calm, advising, "If a gorilla approaches, stay. Then, slowly, back away." McCarthy knows it is less than useless to get angry at gorillas: "Their culpability is based on ignorance. They are in their language. We are in ours." He was entranced by his first encounter with primates, and awed by the teeming life in the homeland of HIV. His pilgrimage proved, astonishingly, that successful ecosystems are self-balancing. They are based on cooperation, and not competition. Therefore they could be eyeballed without harm, and McCarthy survived.

4. An Irony in Which Analogy Bleeds to Death
A month later in Zanzibar, watching television in a hotel room, McCarthy records a British newscaster reporting on the kidnapping of tourists near the gorilla preserve they had just left. Several tourists were killed and survivors gave interviews. Sandra Thurman, Clinton's AIDS ambassador to Africa, reminded us that there are over one million AIDS orphans in Uganda alone.

McCarthy knew that people go to Kitum Cave and die seven days later, but he thought it was from disease, not bullets. Again, he was glad that he didn't die. He wondered if he was somehow blessed.

5. Provincetown

Due to heavy fog or some other disaster (McCarthy does not remember), his plane to Provincetown is diverted to Hyannis. A friend, Mary Jo Paranzino, a songwriter with a beautiful voice, picks him up and drives him back to Provincetown. When they arrive, McCarthy gets in his van and drives alone through the streets, slowly, for an hour, playing a tape of Paranzino's song, called "Provincetown." Her lyrics, in part: "Provincetown ... where being different is not a shame."

McCarthy, committed to his role of "gay video historian," is driven by knowing that "this is a time of firsts for my people." His full-length documentary, *Nocebo = Witchcraft*, shown at this year's Provincetown International Film Festival, narrates his own first: going to Africa and returning, all the more alive, and in the company of friends.

Christopher Busa is the founder and editorial director of Provincetown Arts.

PHOTOS: PETER LIEN VIDEO STILL: RECESS VIDEO



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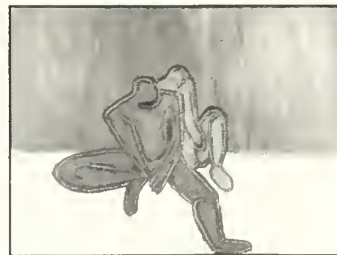
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What to Make with Rotten Eggs (Since **Iceland** Grows No Lemons)

Welcome to Iceland, a one-day layover on the cheapest flight to Europe. Only \$369—there had to be a catch. Exiting the plane, I stared in disbelief at three unattended infants in strollers. I wanted to wait by them until their idiot parents returned so that I might scold them, then thought better of it as I muttered from my Xeroxed Icelandic vocabulary (copied from Provincetown Library's "when in" section) and realized I sounded like a Muppet, the Swedish chef Muppet.

It was maybe a day later, standing in the London train station, that I became acutely aware of what I had done. I got a phone card and called Lori. I wanted to go home. I wanted to walk on the beach, look at the seals, drink hot chocolate, eat popcorn, and watch movies, anything really to be back home. At my house. The one where the heat is included. Three phone cards later and I knew. *What was I thinking?* To start my trip in Iceland? As though the name itself wasn't enough of a clue.

And what about my hair—swathed like little baby Jesus in a purple fleece thing that I'm pretty sure is meant for your neck. I couldn't get a comb through it, couldn't get my fingers through it, couldn't even get it unraveled from the top of my head. I'm not kidding.

I had decided to see all that Iceland had to offer, besides Björk, cultured dairy products, and an odd fascination with smelted fish. Oh, I couldn't be stopped. What with paying roughly a hundred bucks for lunch—iceberg lettuce, weird shrimp crepe, and coffee (*maybe I tipped too much ... maybe I've been swindled by the overzealous bus driver, or the means-well youth hostel girl*)—I set out to visit the Blue Lagoon. Something about Brooke Shields and brother-sister love kept poking me in my freshly dyed mahogany head (to ward off the Italians, not that it mattered, being that I fit their criteria of food-eater and air-breather).

Nevertheless, I was bus-bound for "one of Iceland's many natural wonders"—what a crock. The attendants (one of whom bore an uncanny resemblance to Ivana Trump), shooed me in the direction of the women's locker room. It was the longest walk ever, second only to the walk out of there. Damp, it was very damp. I didn't want to touch anything and I didn't want anything to touch me. There I was, stark raving naked in the middle of an empty locker room, attempting to get my lucky Swim for Life bathing suit (the one with the skirt) over my winter hips, while trying to figure out how to get outside without touching the floor. Of course I had decided not to bring the flip flops that every travel guide suggested. Nope, if I brought

them, I'd certainly not have had room for my extensive belt buckle collection. God knows I couldn't go anywhere without that, or without my scarves, in case I felt like dressing up.

All I could think of now was my high school gym teacher trying to put the fear of God (North Carolina—not a problem) into us about the woes of athlete's foot. "If left unattended it could spread up your leg and into your groin area; has been known to cause infertility in women and impotency in men." No one was safe. I convinced myself that this place was teeming with more contagions than that monkey from the *Outbreak* movie. I hadn't been this afraid of anything since second grade when the twins spread chicken pox and wiped out the entire class. We were quarantined, we were eight. I tried to reassure myself that this was just the sort of thing that Ice's would enjoy—to frolic amongst the icebergs, to cut holes through eight feet of ice and swim, to perch themselves like seals on the frozen tundra. I now knew that the only reason that I was the only one standing naked amidst steel gray lockers was that everyone else was home procreating or reading, because they had more common sense than to go "swimming" in a hail storm. But not me.

It was difficult to swim. The hail kept hitting the water and spraying the sulfuric (acid?) water in my eyes, and it stung. "You big baby," I muttered to myself as I hid behind a man-made wall, a barrier between me and the elements. *I could die out here and no one would notice. I could get hit in the head by a hail ball the size of a fist and be knocked unconscious in two feet of water, just because I'm too afraid to put my feet down and touch whatever it is that lurks at the bottom of this cesspool.*

Then it hit me. They weren't at home getting laid (despite the fact that they have the highest birthrate), they were at home because—fuck this—they could be! They knew better, and now I do too. After the most expensive fifteen minutes of my life I made my way back into the locker room. I was freezing, and although the sign recommended that I shower before I entered the Lagoon, showering after was my best decision yet. I slipped off my lucky Swim for Life bathing suit and stood there under the barely warm trickle of water, mumbling some incoherent, stream-of-conscious hate rant while reading the "wall of precaution," a veritable list, in five languages, of things that you should and shouldn't do at the Blue Lagoon.

I should shower before I entered at my own risk.
I should get out if I felt too hot or if I got dizzy.
I should take precautions if I was pregnant or had heart problems.

Nowhere did it say, "Please remove all jewelry before entering due to impending chemical reactions," or "If you've recently had your hair done to ward off the Italians ..." (not that it mattered). I was finding it very difficult to get my fingers through my hair, and when I could, was alarmed at the amount that came out. Okay, okay, breathe.

I turned off the water and got dressed as if in a trance, then made my way through the door and to the longest hall ever, without foreseeing the last problem I was about to face. Back at the youth hostel, I gathered my belongings, asked again for

directions to the hotel where I was to catch my five a.m. airport shuttle, counted my Kronas, and realized that with the price of the shuttle, my dinner was to consist of pretzels or an Icelandic version of Fig Newtons. I washed my pretzels down with the water fountain, then nearly choked to death on pretzel dust as I tipped the plastic package and its contents into my mouth.

I decided that a warm shower would calm me down. I was ready to go to bed at six p.m., ready to end this nightmare. "I fucking forgot to pack a towel," I screamed, then dried off with my flannel pajamas.

Just then I heard it, the sound of 200-plus schoolchildren ascending the stairs, fresh off a bus. I stood there in disbelief, clutching my Aveda products, and asked my suite mate what the hell was going on. Apparently they were from Sweden or Finland (whatever, they all look the same to me), and were on a field trip to "discover Iceland." Whatever happened to going to the local fire station? If I was allowed to pet the Dalmatian or hit the siren I was happy, but never did we load up a plane and head out to another country, not even Canada.

Things went from bad to worse as I realized that I'd left my lucky Swim for Life bathing suit back at the Blue Lagoon. Visions of Ivana prancing around in my suit plagued me as my super-emollient, extra-luxurious, thirty-dollar conditioner refused to penetrate the nest that had formed on my head. It must just be the water, I told myself. I still reeked of rotten eggs. I knew that once I got to France, Mike would have some expensive conditioner that only fags in Paris knew about and that there was a secret handshake to even get. If nothing else, the water had to be better. They exported it for chrissakes. Evian—naïve spelled backwards, and I don't care.

Molly Hardison's WOMR show, "Live Alien Broadcast," (on which she occasionally refers to herself as the superhero Naptime Kitty) is on every other Tuesday night.



ICELAND'S FAMOUS BLUE LAGOON, AS PICTURED ON A TOURIST-TEMPTING WEBSITE

Flying with Horses

I am the daughter of a navy jet-turned-commercial airline pilot—raised in a tough love school of travel with a corporate dress code and a “you pack it, you carry it” luggage limit. In the industry, I’m what’s known as an “S3B”—which means that I fly stand-by, behind almost everyone. First to check in, last to board. I was twenty-seven years old before I ever held a boarding card with my name on it. In matters of aviation, I have been raised to be obedient and self-sufficient—an ideal traveler.

On this Lufthansa Cargo flight, however, I have an actual reservation. And something about this enhanced status makes me want to break the rules. Behind the hangar of the cargo building at JFK International Airport, I risk our national security. I take photographs of the loading dock. I use my cell phone to call my father while standing under the plane. And, during my security clearance check, I tell a lie.

I didn’t mean to lie. Maybe it was all the men in uniform or the weird combination of questions about my immigration status, drug and arrest history, and animal husbandry skills. *Animal husbandry skills?* I panic. The customs officer slides me a form and points to the last question. It is virtually chemical, my desire to get on that plane. A molecular urge. “Yes,” I lie, “I know how to administer a tranquilizer.”

Cleared by customs for equine cargo travel on Lufthansa flight 1673, I head off across the asphalt apron toward the shipping vans at the far end of the lot. Somewhere between the hangar and the horse vans, I encounter a gassy mirage, an unsettling runway vision with eerie waves of pavement and mercurial ponds wafting up at me. A wall of hay and shavings rises out of the concrete. The wind shifts, and suddenly, I am overwhelmed by the smell of horses mixing with fuel. A loud, guttural burst of whinnying comes from the bridge of an effulgent red and silver tractor trailer. Right away, I can tell that this one is trouble.

I have been granted approval by the United States Equestrian Team (USET) to fly to Frankfurt, Germany with seven of the team’s horses in the cargo area of a 747 aircraft. The horses waiting on the tractor trailer are fresh out of a 48-hour pre-export quarantine at the USET Headquarters in Gladstone, New Jersey. There is a steady stream of activity on the ground as the grooms cart wheelbarrows full of feed and hay into the metal luggage boxes. Horse people are not light packers and competing overseas means lugging a lot of equipment. Everything, from the blankets and the buckets to the tack trunks and the rakes, screams “USA” in red, white and blue. I’ve never seen so much patriotism in one place. These allegiant animals are flying off to Europe as part of a specially-funded tour offering America’s most

promising equestrians a chance to gain international experience in preparation for the Olympics. This year’s U.S. Developing Rider team is made up of five riders—all young women under the age of thirty. One of these women, Laura Bowery, is my childhood friend.

Laura and I grew up riding in the backyard barns of Long Island. Horses were everything, then. Riding was the most powerful way I knew to occupy my own body. Before I rode actual horses, I cantered on two legs up to jumps made of milk crates and branches. I was motion. All that wind, the heart-stopping leap in the air. Flight. The Girl Scout Handbook said that “no other form of transportation can give you the same feeling of companionship.” But as any horse-girl knows, riding isn’t about companionship; it’s one step beyond—identifying with the mechanics of motion, becoming one with the horse. Even then, Laura was already part horse. She anticipated every move, knew when a horse was going to spook or buck, when it would stop in front of a jump. I was obsessed with the details—the rituals and order, the perfection of the equipment and the clothes. Laura wanted to win.

Since then, our paths have diverged into writing and riding—each of us becoming one with our obsessions. When I learned, last June, that Laura had qualified for the USET, I petitioned the headquarters to allow me to travel with the team and write about her first experience with international competition. In the thirteen years since I quit riding, Laura has secured a sponsor, incorporated her training farm, and in the last year, imported three world-class jumpers from Europe. I’ve recently become acquainted with these new personalities: the very consistent and beguiling Altesse du Boele, the charming people-pleaser, Sky Boy, and the powerful, eternally distracted Aiglefin. I will be accompanying Laura’s sister, Jenn, who manages the barn and has been charged with the immense responsibility of ensuring that these characters arrive safely in Frankfurt.

Jenn is not alone in her endeavor. William J. Barnes, a seventeen-year veteran of equine air transportation, brokers the entire operation, which consists of three crews of shipping and loading experts on two continents. The Barnes Agency has shipped horses to almost every part of the world,

serving some 400 equine passengers each year. Theoretically, a 747 can accommodate eighty-seven horses. The most Barnes has ever shipped on one plane is sixty-six. Barnes ships other animals, too. “Obviously,” he tells me, “we never ship zoo animals and horses together. But baby chicks are a good match.”

Barnes, an affable man with piercing blue eyes, has a lot to say about international border and quarantine policies both in the States and abroad.



PAINT-BY-NUMBERS BY THE AUTHOR

In particular, he is concerned that some of the European practices, such as the 30-day pre-export isolation period for horses seeking permanent residence in the European Community (EC), act as a “restraint on trade.” I have to ask him to slow down and explain why it matters. The horse trade seems to flow mostly from Europe to the U.S., he tells me. The cost and inconvenience of the European-imposed isolation period (an additional \$600 for boarding, plus USDA inspector fees at \$65 an hour) make the exporting of American horses (even as pets) prohibitive. The U.S. imposes no such pre-export isolation period which encourages American riders to buy European horses. These European imports, or warmbloods, as they are called, are big and powerful and bred for jumping, in contrast to the quick, delicate thoroughbreds which, these days, are bred in

America primarily for racing. In fact, at last year's American Invitational (considered the Super Bowl of show jumping), the top thirty American riders were all riding European imports. For the purposes of competition, these USET horses will travel on a 90-day temporary pass, thus foregoing the isolation period. Still, there is a great deal of government bureaucracy on both ends to ensure that a variety of equine diseases are not transported across international borders.

The USET requires that a veterinarian travel with the team when competing abroad. Back on the runway, Dr. Tim Ober stands at the base of the truck, collecting the health credentials and passports for each horse. Yes, passports. They are dense with stamps. The international show jumping circuit includes major Grand Prix competitions throughout the U.S., Mexico, Canada, Belgium, Germany, France, Hungary, the Netherlands and Brazil. This summer, the Olympic Games are to be held in Sydney, Australia. These horses have been more places than most people have. From here on, the passports will be kept centrally in order to respond quickly to official requests for documentation. Each bears an illustrated diagram of a horse with individuating markings, whorls, scars or brands drawn in red ink. Dr. Ober flips through the thick, burgundy booklets, reviews the dates of import for each horse, and secures them in his briefcase. It is Dr. Ober's first trip with the team. He is meticulous and relaxed, young and sunburned. Just before we begin loading, he pulls a tranq kit from his vet bag and slips it into his pants pocket.

This is a jeans and chinos crowd. And though I am finally free of an aviation dress code, I find that, even in slacks and a button-down shirt, I manage to look overdressed. I watch as Jenn dips in and out of the tractor trailer, diligently preparing hay nets and buckets. She is a career horsewoman, unable to stand still, always anticipating. For this tour, she has packed ninety baggies-full of horse electrolytes, and thirteen pairs of Levi's. I put a cuff in my slacks and follow her up a large ramp to the top level of the tractor trailer, where the troublemaker stands alone.

Aiglefin, known as Alfie around the barn, is an eight-year-old Selle Francais stallion. He is big, even by European standards. From the ground to his withers, at four inches to a hand, he measures 16.3. The top of my head barely reaches his shoulder. It isn't his height, however, that's most impressive; it's his heft. A thick muscle of a horse, Alfie carries his giant head high. A white star, the shape of Martha's Vineyard, appears just above and between his dark glassy eyes. His veins are a road map of attitude and anticipation, bulging in sharp relief off his hairless face and crawling out from under the fleece-covered shipping halter. Jenn tells me that he has sweated off his facial hair, working himself into an excited lather every time he leaves his stall. As a result, his face appears darker and shinier than the rest of his brown body, his every expression intensified by a flash of wet skin and muscle.

Stallions are, by their very nature, more difficult to handle than mares or geldings. Above all else, the instinct of a stallion is to breed. People who work around them are always doing math,

dividing up space and splitting distance to keep them as far away from mares as possible. The accompanying mares on this trip are regulated with Depo Provera to keep them from coming into season. Still, travel seems to have raised this stallion's level of expectation, unearthing a blind and ferocious will.

When Alfie announces himself again, this time at close range, the depth of his bellow stops me in my tracks. He lifts one bandaged leg and with his rubber-booted hoof, strikes at the ground repeatedly, until the truck gives way to rocking. He flares his nostrils, revealing a shock of red membrane. "Ea-sy," Jenn soothes and moves toward him, grasping his halter with one hand and reaching up with the other to swipe a glob of Vick's Vapo-Rub into each nostril. He yields for a moment, dropping his head slightly. "What's the matter, Alf?" she teases, "Can't smell the girls?" She turns toward me, a quick look of concern crossing her face. "You don't have your period, do you?"

Alfie is big, loud and horny—a lousy combination in any airline passenger. In the world of equine transportation, he is what's called a "bad shipper." On the ground and in the air, he requires special handling. Alfie will be flying first class to Frankfurt. First class, cargo style, means that for \$6,200, he gets the jet stall to himself. When it comes time to load, Alfie is led from the truck through a wooden-plank chute into a metal crate lined with rubber mats, and secured with rope ties on either side of his halter. The loading ramp folds up to become the back wall and hinges shut with metal pins. Up front, there is a small area with water buckets, a hay net, a jump seat for a human escort and enough room to tend to the horse during the flight.

It is only 8:00 a.m., but already the heat engulfs us—the pavement and metal a magnet for sun. Alfie's crate is wheeled off toward the hangar so he can cool off and get weighed. In the distance, all I can see are his ears. It takes less than an hour to load the remaining six horses into their jet stalls. When Alfie resurfaces, there is an enormous manila tag wired to the door of his crate. He weighs 1,965 kilograms, almost as much Sky Boy and Altesse combined.

The crates enter the plane through a side entrance toward the back of the aircraft. The door opens up, arching wide above the cavity, a gaping mouth with a 40-foot hydraulic lift at the base. On the tail of the plane is a blue gesture of a bird on a yellow sun. Lufthansa Cargo. The crates rise slowly in the air and vanish into the cabin. "Guess where I am, Dad?" I shout into my cell phone over the loud cranks and bangs of pre-flight checks. It is the first time I have really been here, in the bowels of an airport, the place where he has spent the last thirty years. I want to reach across the ages and join him, make up for all the distance, bond somehow. My father demands to know my exact location. "On the runway," is all I can offer, before he becomes official, citing the dangers of cellular disruption. Dial tone. Then he is gone.

I board at the front of the plane, up an outdoor carriage of stairs connected just under and to the left of Lufthansa's giant blue L. It's raw inside, the kind of raw you find in warehouses or homes under construction. The gray fiberglass

floors are sliced with vertical metal tracks. All four crates are pushed together, one behind the other, like mini railroad cars. Alfie's crate is parked up front, just under the hump of the upstairs cabin and cockpit; the mares bring up the rear.

There is no one to greet me, no check-in or boarding card required. It feels oddly informal. Out of habit, I begin to impose my own bureaucracy and realize with a start that my passport is packed in my luggage which has been stashed on the other side of the wooden divider inside Alfie's crate. Once his escort disembarks, I steal around to the sliding door at the side of the crate. I hip-check the latch to release it, and slip inside. The crate smells sweet and earthy, a mix of green hay, wood shavings and horse hair. Alfie gives me a sideways glance, twitches once or twice, and continues on with his breakfast. As I duck under his head and reach around for my duffel, he shakes the hay net, hard, releasing a cascade of alfalfa down my shirt. I have to frisk myself to get rid of the bent stalks of hay lodged in my bra and in the waistband of my slacks.

A steep, ten-step metal ladder leads to the passenger area on the upper deck. I'm surprised to discover that, at least for take-off and landing, I too, am flying first class. A glass of orange juice waits on the arm tray of my cushy leather seat. It takes two hours to load the rest of the cargo. My skin itches from the hay. To keep myself from scratching, I stare out the window at the overstuffed pallets of other cargo, covered in plastic and secured with vast nets of rope, as they make their way onto the plane. I am intimately acquainted with the gravitational pull between horses and humans. But, there is nothing familiar about the inside of a cargo plane or the strange convergence of horses, cars, chemicals and baseball shirts—all around me—contained in this single gleaming fuselage of faith and flight.

Lufthansa supplies a steward for any cargo flight with over four passengers. There are six of us on this flight: the vet, three grooms, myself, and a courier from the Guggenheim Museum in New York. She arrived the night before with two paintings bound for a big show in Munich. She looks battle-weary. "They've been bumping cargo all morning," she offers. "Live things always take priority."

"Are your paintings valuable?" Jenn asks.

The courier's response is deliberately coy. "The museum's insurance policy mandates that a museum representative accompany any fine art valued over a million dollars."

Jenn nudges her fellow grooms. "Same here," she gloats.

Just before take-off, the steward holds up two portable oxygen tanks and instructs us to strap them to our bodies while in the cargo area, in case of decompression. It's 10:40 a.m. I hold my breath as we all lurch into the air. Over the roar of the engines, I hear Alfie again. He has something to declare. I close my eyes and bend my head. Not prayer, merely appreciation.

There is something so meditative about this climb. The suspended present tense of flight. A feeling of freedom and relief always comes over

me, not for making it into the air, but because for the duration of the flight, I am not expected to be anywhere else. How often I have borrowed this time to reinvent myself, imagine my life anew. I never set my watch ahead, never anticipate what's happening there, now. I like the simplicity of the equation. Day lost, distance gained. I recline. The clouds are layered, a latte sky.

In the early, romantic days of airplane travel, my father flew for Pan Am. For over twenty years, that big blue ball was everywhere in our lives, on tee shirts, cocktail glasses, our coffee table. It represented what was adventurous and sophisticated about the world. It was what we had to look at when our father was gone. After returning home from a trip, he once presented my sister and me with miniature stewardess outfits. Periwinkle blue jumpers over white blouses. White stockings with white patent leather shoes. A round bowler hat, with little plastic combs inside. I imagined it meant I could join him. Instead, we became little logos—trotted out for public relations events, photo opportunities involving the FAA and their battles over deregulation and international access. I hated discovering that there were rights to air, that the sky could be owned. I was four. I still have that hat, my little hope.

When Pan Am went under, I was in college. It was like a death in our family. Suddenly, the globe was just gone. I remember hearing that flight attendants with twenty years of experience were being hired to work at a coffee shop on the corner of Ninth Avenue and 19th Street in New York City. My father was lucky enough to get a job with another airline. And though he had been poised for a captain's seat on Pan Am, his seniority was sacrificed in the buyout, leaving him to sit in the third seat, his view all lights and weather. When my father retires, at the end of the month, he will do so without the runway celebration afforded a captain. Instead, when it's over, he will pack up his flight bag full of engineer's manuals and step off the plane as he has nearly every other day for the last thirty years. No firetrucks, no ceremony.

I wonder if he will really ever be finished with flying.

As soon as our altitude levels out, I unfasten my seatbelt and wrestle with the oxygen tank. I can't wait to get to the horses. I ease myself down the ladder and my tank pitches forward, nearly taking me with it, a 14-foot drop into the cargo area. I feel as if I've broken in somewhere. It's cold and loud down here, no carpet or seats or luggage bins to insulate the cabin from the machinery churning all around it. I walk down a small aisle, my elbows brushing against the crates on one side and the wall of the plane on the other. The oxygen tank clangs with each step. The horses seem calm, encapsulated in their dark dens, the kind of private quiet you find in a barn late at night, only we're at 30,000 feet. Dr. Ober says that horses don't experience pressurization in their ear canals the way humans do. Still, Altesse is on to us. She sways anxiously from side to side, bobbing in the

dark cavity of her stall. She is lathered with sweat. She won't drink. She knows something is up.

Alfie on the other hand, takes a long, deep sip, holds it until I move the bucket and then releases it down my pant leg. He shakes his head madly, demanding more. I try again, and meet the same end. Drenched and demoralized, I move on to Sky Boy. He is gentle and appreciative; he likes a good rub. I run my hand under his mane and scratch the crest of his neck. I press my lips hard against the pink splotch at the center of his muzzle. He leans into my attention, his snotty nose running onto my arm. This is what I miss most: myself, in relation to horses. All flesh and pulse and breath. Open, big-hearted. Unafraid.

My last horse show was in August of 1986. In the division in which I competed, riders under the age of eighteen had to win four classes within a season to qualify for the national finals. I did not qualify. That is a hard sentence to write without the flood of justification rushing up to join it. A borrowed horse, chronic lameness, the surgeries, the money. Equestrians with greater means "chased" blue ribbons, crossing state lines to compete up and down the East Coast every weekend. My last junior year, I watched the weeks slip away, one competition at a time. Every day, a countdown to the inevitable.

For the rest of the seven-hour flight, I remain down here in the cargo area of the plane. I offer the horses water and treats, and get to know them a bit. Somewhere over the Atlantic, gravity begins to make sense, as does metric conversion, and other difficult matters. At some point, I hear the sounds of dinner being served above me. I give each horse a carrot and leave them to their rhythmic chewing. The steward hands me down a tray and tells me I can stay. The only place to sit is on the metal box that holds the emergency raft. The exit door, with its tempting red handle, looms to my right. I lift the lid on my tray. Chicken breast and arugula nested on hand-painted china. Miniature salt and pepper shakers. Walnut mousse parfait. The food is first class; the decor, pure storage room. Alfie sits across from me, his eyes glinting out from the top of the crate. The box is cold underneath me, the tray, warm on my lap. The whole thing feels unfamiliar and oddly erotic, like a blind date.

When I dream about riding, I'm always running late, always missing something—a boot, the collar to my shirt. Sometimes I dream there is a horse I have forgotten about, neglected for years. In truth, everything is ready to go, hanging in the closet, just as it did thirteen years ago. The elegant herringbone jackets, polished leather field boots, a braided riding crop, my black velvet helmet. A week after my last horse show, I went away to college. Horses were replaced, I thought, by a life of the mind. Still, I miss the intimacy of being good at something physical. I read somewhere recently that failure offers an opportunity to make something of the fragments. I didn't retire; I just stopped. Maybe that's what's so hard. Cradled in the belly of this bird, I come face to face with my own failed aspirations. The heartbreak of horses. What it means to leave something you love and never look back.

When we land, the German customs officer comes right onto the plane. He pays more attention

to the horses' passports than to ours and then tells us that the only way off is down—with the horses. I step into the closest crate and, as luck would have it, become an escort to the only horse that needs a tranquilizer.

For all of Alfie's threats, it is Altesse who has the most difficult time. She is a silent worrier, a ball of anxiety, who has worked herself into a frenzy. In truth, even if I had a tranquilizer and could administer it, it is already too late. Men in reflector jackets move the caravan of horses along electronically at the same speed used for the inanimate objects that were deplaned ahead of us. The cylinders ripple the ground underfoot in a rolling earthquake motion. I look to Dr. Ober for help, but he is suspended in the air on the lift with Sky Boy waiting to be lowered to the ground. Altesse's eyes are bulging so far out of her head, she looks like a reptile. The only tools I have at my disposal are my hands and voice. I coo at her, not words exactly, but reassuring sounds. I grab hold of her halter and attempt to steady her as I am lurched from one side of the crate to the other. I glance at the jump seat and notice, just as we reach solid ground, that it is equipped with a seat belt. Our passage is complete.

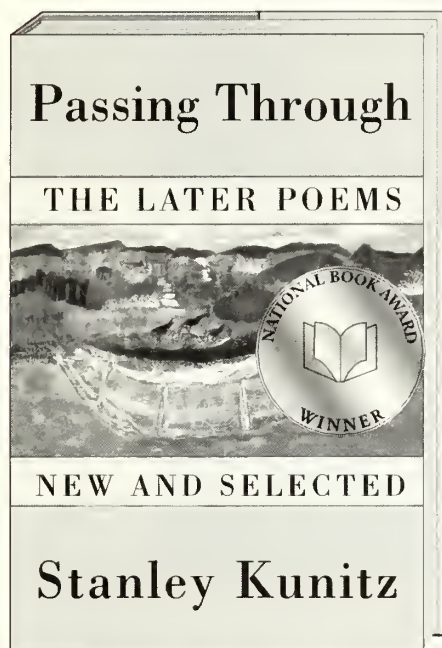
The German cargo crew seems to resent our midnight arrival. Once on the runway, they hook all four crates together and drive us around the airport at warp speed for forty-five minutes before delivering us to the animal hotel. In a sterile building distinguished by huge blocks of cement and rows of drains, we check their temperatures and bed them down for the night. As we leave, an attendant hits a switch and a mechanical wall lowers in front of Alfie's stall. The next morning, the "border witches," as they like to call themselves, bar us from the health check. Our departure is delayed as the customs officials examine each horse's credentials to ensure that no "horse-swapping" has taken place. Fed, bandaged, and only slightly rested, these American athletes board two English lorries and head off to France.

As a team, the USET Developing Riders will hear the national anthem more than once, winning the Nation's Cup in Falsterbo, Sweden, in Budapest, Hungary and placing second in Lummen, Belgium. Altesse du Boele will make three clean rounds in Geesteren, the Netherlands, and become the third fastest horse to go through the finish markers that day. Alfie will persist, in grand stallion-style, shocking himself on a live wire as he attempts to climb the back wall of his stall. He'll even go so far as to buck Laura off while training near a breeding farm in France. But he makes up for his randy behavior in the end—as Laura becomes the only American, the only woman and the youngest rider to win a ribbon in this year's Derby at Lummen.

And I fly back to New York. Stand-by. An S3B for the very last time.

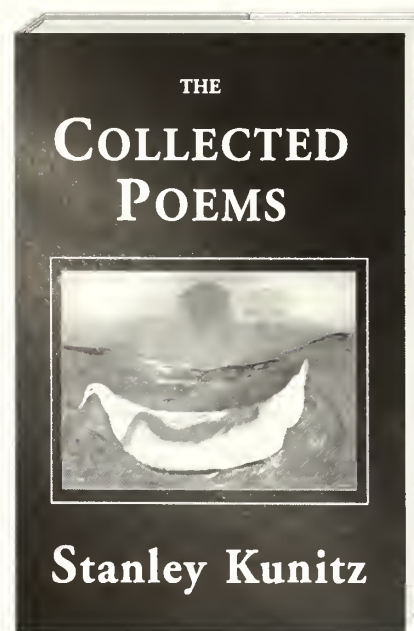
Karin Cook is the author of What Girls Learn (Vintage), which is now in its ninth printing. She lives in New York and Provincetown and is at work on a new novel, Sweat, about horses, contagion and quarantine.

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STANLEY KUNITZ AND ELISE ASHER, PROVINCETOWN, 1980
PHOTOGRAPH BY RENATE PONSOLD MOTHERWELL

EDITED BY JASON SHINDER

Favorite Lines of Poetry by Stanley Kunitz Chosen by His Friends
on the Occasions of
his 95th Birthday and the Publication of
*The Collected Poems**

We learn, as the thread plays out, that we belong
Less to what flatters us than to what scars.

—from "The Dark and the Fair"
chosen by ELISE ASHER

Energy is the only life ... Energy is eternal delight

—William Blake, from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"

"I suppose that above all what I've learned is that the imagination is
a portion of the divine principle, that energy is eternal delight and
that everything that lives is holy."

—Stanley Kunitz, from "Stanley Kunitz on William Blake:
A Conversation with Jason Shinder"

* Stanley Kunitz's *The Collected Poems* will be published
by WW Norton & Company, Inc. in October 2000.
Poetry reprinted with permission of the publisher.

Desire, desire, desire.
The longing for the dance
stirs in the buried life.

—from "Touch Me"
chosen by LINDA PASTAN

But what spring-blooded stock
Sprouts deathless violets in the skull
That, pawing on the hard and bitter rock
Of reason, make thinking beautiful?

—from "Approach of Autumn"
chosen by ROBERT HASS

The sands whispered, *Be separate*,
the stones taught me, *Be hard*.
I dance, for the joy of surviving,
on the edge of the road.

—from "An Old Cracked Tune"
chosen by ANNE-MARIE LEVINE, by ROBERT JAY LIFTON, and by
STEPHEN BERG, who notes: "A mere four lines! I think this quatrain
hit me again because of its adamant self-definition, its power to call
up my own failure to be equally sure of where I stand. For his
reminder of that quandary and for the profoundly humane music of
his poems, for his generosity and inspiring, heroic belief that poetry
is essential to our lives, I will always be grateful to Stanley."

I'm the boy in the white flannel gown
sprawled on this coarse gravel bed
searching the starry sky,
waiting for the world to end.

—from "Halley's Comet"
chosen by ELISE PASCHEN and by GERALD STERN

Some must break

Upon the wheel of love, but not the strange,
The secret lords, whom only death can change.

—from "Lovers Relentlessly"
chosen by JOYCE CAROL OATES, who notes: "*The Wheel of Love* is the
title of my first collection of stories, published in 1970."

I wept for my youth, sweet passionate young thought,
And cozy women dead that by my side
Once lay: I wept with bitter longing, not
Remembering how in my youth I cried.

—from "I Dreamed That I Was Old"
chosen by HUGH SEIDMAN and by FRANK X. GASPAR, who notes:
"Oh, to have written that!"

What do we know
beyond the rapture and the dread?

—from "The Abduction"
chosen by LUCIE BROCK-BROIDO

The hinges groan: a rush of forms
Shivers my name, wrenched out of me.
I stand on the terrible threshold, and I see
The end and the beginning in each other's arms.

—from "Open the Gates"
chosen by JOSHUA WEINER

I walk obscurely in a cloud of dark:
Yea, when I kneeled, the dark kneeled down with me.

—from "The Guilty Man"
chosen by STANLEY MOSS, who notes: "Here are two lines written
by Stanley Kunitz that should make it clear to God that his highest
expectations for the human race were not groundless."

As if it didn't matter
which way was home;
as if he didn't know
he loved the earth so much
he wanted to stay forever.

—from "The Long Boat"
chosen by SOPHIE CABOT BLACK

Time swings her burning hands.
The blossom is the fruit,
And where I walk, the leaves
Lie level with the root.

—from "The Way Down"
chosen by DORE ASHTON

I can scarcely wait till tomorrow
when a new life begins for me,
as it does each day,
as it does each day.

—from "The Round"
chosen by LUCILLE CLIFTON

Great events are about to happen.

—from "Day of Foreboding"
chosen by MELANIE BRAVERMAN

Born upright in my bed that night
I saw my father flying;
the wind was walking on my neck,
the windowpanes were crying.

—from "Three Floors"
chosen by RICHARD WILBUR, who notes: "For dear Stanley, who has never
settled for the good-enough that spoils the world, and who can write
with power in a Mother Goose stanza."

O teach me how to work and keep me kind.

—from "Father and Son"
chosen by JASON SHINDER

She wept, she railed, she spurned the meat
Men toss into the muslin cage
To make their spineless doxy bleat
For pleasure and for patronage

—from "She Wept, She Railed"
chosen by DANIEL HALPERN

In a murderous time
the heart breaks and breaks
and lives by breaking.
It is necessary to go
through dark and deeper dark
and not to turn.

—from "The Testing-Tree"
chosen by MARIE HOWE

In a murderous time
the heart breaks and breaks
and lives by breaking.

—from "The Testing-Tree"
chosen by CLEOPATRA MATHIS

It is necessary to go
through dark and deeper dark
and not to turn.

—from "The Testing-Tree"
chosen by PETER DAVISON

What do I want of my life?
More! More!

—from "Journal for My Daughter"
chosen by B.H. FRIEDMAN

Sufficient unto each poet are his own disasters. . . . Conservation of
energy is the function of form. . . . Art withers without fellowship. . . .
The supreme morality of art is to endure.

—selected from various essays and interviews in *A Kind of Order*,
A Kind of Folly and *Next-to-Last Things*
chosen by ROGER SKILLINGS

Peace! Peace!
To be rocked by the Infinite!
As if it didn't matter
which way was home

—from "The Long Boat"
chosen by MAXINE KUMIN, who notes: "I see these lines as the fulcrum of the
poem, the turning point we must all approach, it is to be hoped, with the
same equanimity as Stanley."

What makes the engine go?
Desire, desire, desire.

—from "Touch Me"
chosen by GAIL MAZUR

At my touch the wild
braid of creation
trembles.

—from "The Snakes of September"
chosen by ROSE SLIVKA

Live in the layers
not on the litter.

—from "The Layers"
chosen by JOHN SKOYLES, who notes: "These lines made immediate sense to
me, serving as a guidepost, and as a reminder to keep focused on the main
thing, not on the stuff that surrounds it."

"Rover!" I call my fourfoot home,
Whose only language is a growl;
Dig up old bones, but he won't come
That chose the world: it is more foul."

—from "Rover"
chosen by STEVEN BAUER

Arg! I am sometimes weary
Of this everlasting search
For the drama in a nutshell,
The opera of the tragic sense

—from "Revolving Meditation"
chosen by PETER KLAPPERT

Be what you are. Give
what is yours to give.
Have style. Dare.

—from "Journal for My Daughter"
chosen by CHRISTOPHER BUSA and by BETTY JEAN LIFTON, who notes: "I ended
my book *Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness* with these lines."

nothing is truly mine
except my name. I only
borrowed this dust.

—from "Passing Through"
chosen by EVE GRUBIN

Let's jump into the car, honey,
and head straight for the Cape

—from "Route Six"
chosen by OLGA BROUMAS and by CYNTHIA HUNTINGTON and BERT
YARBOROUGH, who note, "Every time we leave Hanover to drive
to the Cape one of us quotes these lines and tries to sound like
Stanley, though we don't."

Your turn. Grass of confusion.
You say you had a father once:
his name was absence.

—from "Journal for My Daughter"
chosen by LIAM RECTOR, who notes: "It has never been easy to be
a father, and in this time of transition for men and women I
think it has been especially difficult. Stanley Kunitz's poems have
fathered us all and, in a way most of us would never have thought
possible, so has he."

Pet, spitfire, blue-eyed pony,
here is a new note
I want to pin on your door

—from "After the Last Dynasty"
chosen by LIZ ROSENBERG, who notes: "Back when I was in high
school, David (who I later married) gave me a copy of this
poem, typed, and told me he had written it. My mom found it
tucked behind my bed and asked me, 'Liz, who wrote this poem?'
I told her that David had. She looked at me strangely for a
moment and then said, 'Well, he's a very good poet. A very, very
good poet.'"

The word I spoke in anger
weighs less than a parsley seed,
but a road runs through it
that leads to my grave

—from "The Quarrel"
chosen by RENATE PONSOLD MOTHERWELL

Liebchen,
with whom should I quarrel
except in the hiss of love,
that harsh, irregular flame?

—from "The Quarrel"
chosen by TESS GALLAGHER

The thing that eats the heart is mostly heart.

—from "The Thing That Eats the Heart"
chosen by SUSAN MITCHELL, who notes: "This line has come back
to me, always in Stanley's voice, at crucial moments in my life. I
love the line for its wisdom, its insight into what it means to be
human."

I caught the cold flash of the blue
unappeaseable sky.

—from "Robin Redbreast"
chosen by MAURA STANTON

Blue poured into summer blue,
A hawk broke from his cloudless tower,
The roof of the silo blazed, and I knew
That part of my life was over.

—from "End of Summer"
chosen by KEITH ALTHAUS, who notes: "I like these lines not
only for their elegiac beauty, but because they capture a rare
moment of demarcation, when you suddenly realize that what
has gone before is done, whether a relationship to a place, a
person, or a way of life. It is both fateful and liberating."

Last year my neighbor's dog,
a full-grown Labrador retriever,
chased a grizzly old codger
into the tidal basin,
where shaggy arms reached up
from the ooze to embrace him,
dragging his muzzle under
until at length he drowned.

—from "Raccoon Journal"
chosen by C.K. WILLIAMS, who notes: "These lines have always
struck me as ones embodying as chilling a statement about the
mystery and horror and inevitability of death as any I know.
Its blend of the impersonal, the mythic, and the sensual are
astonishing."

This is my country, where the tireless feet
Of my adventure, homing, will return.
Each day will end in this day; every ship
Will bring me back, bright lip on lonely lip.

—from "Parting"
chosen by HILARY MASTERS

What makes the engine go?
Desire, desire, desire.
The longing for the dance
stirs in the buried life.
One season only,
and it's done.

—from "Touch Me"
chosen by DOROTHY ANTCHAK

I am not done with my changes.

—from "The Layers"
chosen by GRACE SCHULMAN and by CAROL HOUCK SMITH

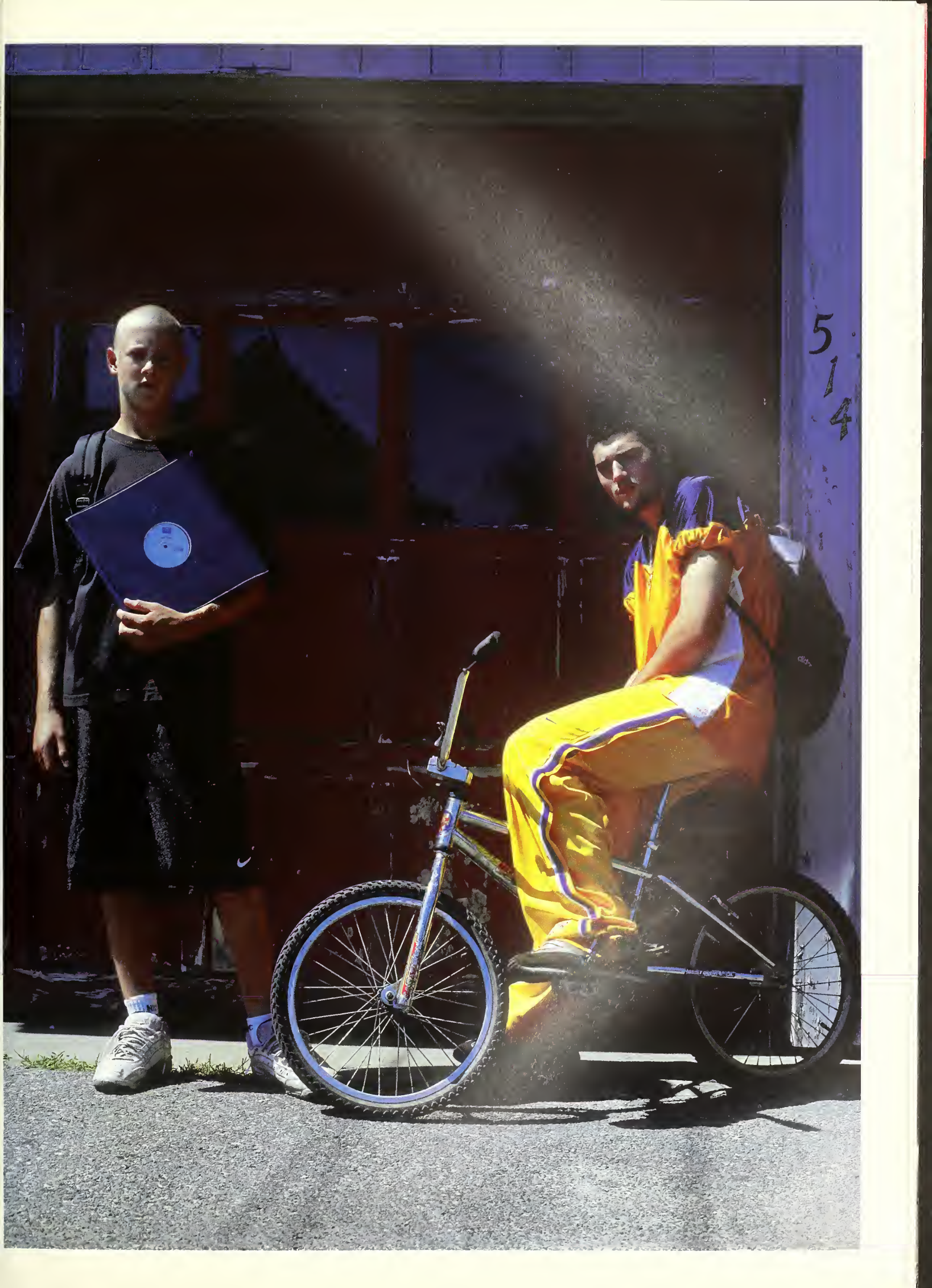
*"Eternal Delight" is part of a larger publication in progress and a
proposed series of similar publications regarding select poets, edited
by Jason Shinder.*

P'town Proud



PHOTOGRAPHS BY

MISCHA RICHTER







MISCHA RICHTER grew up in Provincetown, where his family roots go back to 1624. He has lived in London since 1993, and his photographs have appeared in European magazines including *The Face*, *Sleaze Nation*, *Creative Review*, and *Addict*, and in a book called *Paradise*. To all who posed for P'town Proud—Max Beal, Brooklyn Gamsey, Dimitri Kennedy-Koveiro, Jamie Martin, Zach Shelby Mellert, Ryan Moody, Jordy Parker, Andrew Rowell, and Cody Silva—he says, “Thank you for reminding me where I come from.”

I have seen under a microscope's
lens the legs of a spider paper
spider, the legs thinner
mother's spider, the legs
and still thinner than any other's finest
gauged thread and still
bones, flesh, fluids,
an existence of
purpose with legs
walks, actually weightless
suspend from ceilings
translucent and to exist in
such perspective and in such
with clarity less with clarity.
This is what is
happening to me

When Claude and her two best friends decide to go out, they always meet at Claude's house. While Claude makes reservations or finishes her nails, her friends go up to Claude's room. There, they take off all their clothes except for their underwear. Then they reach into their Coach bags and pull out sausage-like multi-colored fabric tubes stuffed with plastic grocery bags and tied at both ends with some pretty ribbons. They call them their "enhancers."

One best friend likes to tie two enhancers around her slender waist, and bunch the plastic bags so they balloon out around her butt. The other best friend plumps the bags around her hip bones to give herself child-bearing hips. They both make sure to pad their stomachs to the point where people sometimes ask if they are pregnant. They like to preen in front of Claude's mirror, trying to figure out if there's anyplace else they can pad. The first best friend, an entrepreneur, is trying to figure out how to make an enhancer that will give her a double chin.

When Claude calls out it's time to go, they giggle and squeeze themselves back into their clothes. They stop in front of the mirror one last time, admire the pull and bunch of the once loose fabric over their enhanced bodies. Then they run downstairs and everyone piles into Claude's car for the drive to the restaurant or the movie.



*A face starts
inside like a
seed and
grows
outward. The
outer face, if
it is too firm
and
unyielding,
can become an
obstacle. This
process is
natural, both
evolutionary
and
revolutionary.
A face grows,
seeking its
contours, folds,
angles, in
response to the
conditions of
its creation.
If there is
love all
around, it
will be a
trusting face;
if hatred, a
face will be
closed and
rigid,
protective.*

I am lying in
the small
opening under a
eucalyptus
tree. The earth
walls have
collapsed
around me. I
cannot breathe
and there is no
one around me
to hear a cry,
so I save my
breath. The
gentle legs of
spiders are
crawling over
my face and
my shirt.
I cannot
stop them. They
tell me that I
should not have
gone here that
it is too late
talking to me.
The tree is
falling apart
and I can smell
dry rot,
something I
should have
noticed before
entering this
warren, but did
not. And now, it
is more than
just the smell
of wet soil and
wood, there is
also the smell
of beetle dung,
sweet and in its
own way, clean.
There are tree
lice here,
mites, fungi
and though I am
not their
natural host I
know that they
will not object
to me either.
There are no
sounds here
other than the
echo of my
heart and the
occasional
sounds of the
eucalyptus' thin
core crumbling.

SARTRE BEGINS ORPHEE NOIR THUS:
WHAT THEN DID YOU EXPECT WHEN
YOU UNBOUND THE GAG THAT HAD
MUTED THOSE BLACKMOUTHS? THAT
THEY WOULD CHANT YOUR PRAISES?
DID YOU THINK THAT WHEN THOSE
HEARTS THAT OUR FATHERS HAD
FORGOTTEN WERE BOUND TO THE
GROUND WERE FORGOTTEN AS IN
YOU WOULD FIND ADORATION
IN THEIR EYES?

3 terms from *PoMo Ape's Critical and Poetic Terms*

Protoflesh: This new skin growth after foil and chicken fat burns the index finger indicates a vacant an unegotiable site, as the "others" in question will attempt to be like those who, ultimately, hate them. Callous. Shifting into first persons, it usually imagines what it must be like to be a player water, a breeder, an

antique, a slave trader, and/or a fear biter.

Mecca: All imagined run away masters and displaced slave skins will be stuffing pot liquored bacon fat drenched pieces of bread into

his/her smacky greasy

mouths or be spotted doing backspins under snatches of mylar balloons in a mega mall.

Burn: To be dissed. Turned Out.

Wrecked Fucked up beyond primate

comprehension Stalemate Collusion(s). To see stars after being rabbit punched

BERGDORF GOODMAN

2000

PRINTING

This moment appears as a continent, immovable and as wearying as a circular dream, as true to the lines and pitch of a knothole as a knee. Rills, ridges, swirls: a square inch of skin, a yard of wool, a mile of granite, and more of water more still of air, seen through a glass flume that is kept on a shelf in a bedroom or a vestibule, a temporary monumen



an idea is very much a fragment... one human is a fragment... I know a lot of people who move, though they never move anywhere but where they are... why would you want to track that kind of movement? The components involved are movable parts... they move in order to stay... because what makes a whole is more encompassing than physical boundaries... so you have different voices or different narrators of different types of material that can look at each other from across the page... it's very image based... objects, discarded things, fragments, that may be a perspective... and they come up against some idea of themselves, they are forced to recognize the falsity of the idea itself... it's the question of where do people belong... maybe that's our situation here... fragments being put together, I guess in a new way, is like something displaced... that the whole kind of continues just by nature of its malleability... and the only common ground we have is that we just happen to have been selected by a panel which is also multiplicitous... and we just happen to be eating together really. This is not necessarily us drawing the same picture together... displacement is just one of the tropes of American consciousness... you can reject it or call it sentimental or call it high quality or whatever or art... it's just there... like the color of a lot of ways... whatever's out there, we're kind of riffing... I think they will reflect off each other if you put it together correctly, that space in between is going to provide some other interesting information... wouldn't it be nice to have a couple of dead ends? You won't be able to tell what started what... we'll all remember, but the reader or the viewer won't... whatever's on that page is just a source, it's just a mass

Provincetown Is the Center of the Universe

In the first week of June, when I was sixteen, I ran away from my parents' summer home in Truro and found a room with a friend in a small, squalid boarding house on Johnson Street, in Provincetown. What happened there has little to do with poetry, but at the tail end of the summer I looked up and realized I'd not set foot east of Conwell Street for a full three months, and that indeed I'd never wanted to. At that time I thought I never would want to again.

Provincetown has a way of making one feel like that, and then of making one remember feeling like that, and above all of making one wish to feel that way again ... it is an isolate throne of yearning. It is a town with memory, beauty, and suffering built in, home to people who live chiefly in the realm of the imagination and of reproduction in its many incarnations: photographers, painters, mothers, poets.

Eventually, though, one must be exiled from the town one loves, in order to imagine it more fully, and this happened to me when I went away to college. One day I picked up a book of poems in a friend's dorm room and read these lines, from a poem called "The Height of the Church, the Thought of Who's Missing," by Clark Coolidge:

The Devil dawned a second sun in the morning face
we saw him there, cleanly and puissant and stare

I had been writing poems since I was twelve, and no one had ever told me that it was possible to listen in this way—so closely and with such reckless abandon, such fruitful contempt for the rules of syntax, of context, of conventional sense—to the internal rhythm and logic of the inner ear, the inner voice. If my poetical education had taken place entirely in Provincetown, I am not sure I would have ever learned about what is most important in my life as a poet: listening.

The World of Poetry as it exists in Provincetown, and in the institutions of Provincetown, is by and large a homogeneous, static one—a very small town indeed. It is, in my experience, a world that has sprung out of an idea of poetry that is just about thirty-five years old, by my reckoning—an idea that has not so much evolved but narrowed, and lingered peacefully, like a matron on the beach long after the sun has set.

My intention, then, with this selection of twenty-one poems by seventeen poets, is to reintroduce Provincetown to itself—to a World of Poetry that contains within it multitudes. Here is a constellation, a veritable galaxy of poets: some with no connection to Provincetown at all, some with a shady past, some with a summer house, some with a sinecure, some with a fellowship, and some with a yearning. Imagine that Provincetown is the sun, and that these poems are small planets revolving around it, at varying degrees of distance, but with no less relevance.

—REBECCA WOLFF

Rebecca Wolff grew up in New York City and Truro. She is Editor of Fence. Her book, Manderley, is forthcoming from Provincetown Arts Press.

Rae Armantrout

Size

In Heaven there is no want
and we are Wants.

*

Shame
takes sides

with the whole
against the parts.

*

Burning sensation
conceived as central—

lodgpole
or stalk—

while a blow
must be distributed,

as in seeing stars.

*

"I thirst,"

somebody else
might say.

Expression
is for dying gods.

edited by
Rebecca Wolff

Keith Althaus
Rae Armantrout
Paulette Beete
Sandy Brown
Michael Burkard
Clark Coolidge
Michael Craig
Nick Fillmore
Fanny Howe
Kathe Izzo
Chelsey Minnis
Rodney Phillips
Faith Shearin
Jason Shinder
Robert Strong
J.E. Wei
Ronald V. Wilson

Michael Burkard

One Day

One day my window was darkened by a train vertically.
One day my wonderful window darkened with gloves.
One day my window darkened with window #44.
Spelling darkened my window on Tuesday, and Wednesday it rained.
One day my windowed dark drove straight to the bank.
One day I fed the bee-hive from this side of the window.
When I looked in another window the day was not mine, not ever it said.
With their choppy seas, their willingness, their windows.
The ghost of your mother sobbing in the back seat.
Every window has a ghost, but not every car.
Don't come to the silhouette as a confidant.
A cloud would have folded over the hushed harbor but the boaters
 had mad pasts they wanted others like us to hear. We would have to
 stay in late and suffer their voices. Skipping is such a false name
 for such an activity you said.
You said your window isn't the only one which is darkened.
I haven't been alone for two years.
I can't sit still with myself, if that is who I am with.
One of the poets wrote whatever stupid thing I may have said or done.
It was the unwillingness to be stupid which kept me away, or what I saw
 as the unrelenting unwillingness to be stupid. But I don't finally
 believe in my sources anymore than I believe in the poet's.
One of the windows is something my dream said is much older.
My dream of day.
My confidant boards the train three towns after I do.
I say I do in the windowed dark of a wet book.
Against what tree have sticks lashed at blue windows?
My child has been driven out from still another town and is about to
 eat the hands of his little watch.
If the window gets caught taking another window, reach in your pocket for
 a rock, a fork, a piece of literature you can drape on a tee shirt
 when the street in the world feels like you must have wanted something.

Nicholas Fillmore

To a Friend

Pedaling through the rain
on an old 3-speed,
stripe of mud spattered
up the back of the blue windbreaker
you bought at Marine Specialties—

green scarf knotted at the neck,
Hitchcock profile—
 you were hilarious
pumping up and down the green hills
outside our town.

I say that with due affection.
We don't talk anymore.
It's been ten years since we rode out to the point
to watch a sunset, or cruised the bars
in our newest silk and feathers.

Ten years since we split a jug of that horrible red wine
in your room above the café.

 Each summer, sitting late into the night
to talk—to commune, really,
(to you it was sacred)—

about art and life
you let me talk myself out.
How necessary it was
to talk oneself out!
In the glow of a red candle,

in the huge hollowed night,
sensing each other's silence
like a pulse.

 I suppose we were maudlin drunks.
You taught me about style.

For you that was epistemological.
Style, I mean,
which is knowledge, after all,
of suffering, translated
into art.

For me it was still a mystery.
This friendship
claimed after many years
at an end.
Maybe it only hurts my mind.

I know there are reasons
why things hold together, and the proper way
to enter a room,
and that sometimes words destroy the space
inside us in which silence forms
a truer feeling.

Kathe Izzo

I Rested in the Morning

after E.M. Forster

At one time the band was actually
trembling water actually
in the bedroom
*It will prevent the mother
from sadness*
It will prevent this and other sieves
this and other bad news
hope that they would be happy
violent bang bang

Actually the band
girls dressed as boys dressed as girls howls
the mother from sadness singing
violent drums bang bang
they would be happy
wore round the chord
they would be happy
bang

The baby is crying

*with regards to Wallace Stevens,
Eileen Myles, and the scruffy Naropa boy*

It was called "Not Yet."
I was meant to be naked.
It is not that I love my blood so much,
this skin.

Predestined to this night, this noise, and this place
I lean up against a black wall.
Two beers screw up my head,
my eyes. I think:
I like to beat people up; some people just get angry.

All the doors in my house are wide open,
the baby is crying.
I do myself up.
I wear something nice.

I am glad to be able to go out on the street.
There is no shooting.
The grass is in seed, the young birds are flying.

Paulette Beete

Four Measures

1.

surely more to history than

sweet

happy

2.

Goose Island Fest. The night warm & eager, Ross leads the Mighty Blue Kings, a slick of sound. Eddie follows the band masked like a Japanese bicyclist. Holds court in his zoot of stains, spilled beer. Drunk on pretty smells & tepid hands he shouts *Ross, Ross ... these girls want to meet you*. Eddie always requests a song, tonight *Kidney Stew*. Ross always smiles, chides *How come you never ask for my songs?* then calls the chords. Tonight he sings a verse then kneels, shares the microphone with Eddie. Eddie beams, each syllable a careless steam ...

3.

The scene's a gannet

ghosting currents

darting
down

to mock

my tongue's lack of

pinstofix

stuff &

fog

into something measurable.

4.

a bird of sleek & sound braids a spidery ache

J.E. Wei

Moon Landing

On the way to the factory
to peel off the skins of eggplants,
we saw a child lying by a military truck.
The street lamp was dim.
The light fell on her blouse,
crawled with the smell of urine.
Her chest supine; her head disappeared.
Three soul collectors held bamboo swords,
chanting and ringing bells.
Their horses looked up and neighed.

We lifted our heads on the dark path.
Up there in the pearls' hometown,
the child raised her left hand,
like a laurel twig slowly budding
from the Moon Lady's hair.
The child grew into a tree,
topped with the head the Moon Lady sewed back.

The whole night we hid in the lily bush,
listening to the child shaking the tree.
She cried her eyes out for her mother;
her tears became the stars falling down,
pouring on the American rocket
that sliced the sky and cut clouds,
spinning like a voodooed centipede.
"Armstrong, Armstrong!"
Dogs barked in villages.
Soul collectors woke up and shushed them.
The valley was quiet like the child,
except a few horses neighed.
And our dreams slept with her tree,
in a cave of the Moon Lady's palace.

Fanny Howe

Orthodoxy

When training to die
with your back to the train

you cry *India India!*
to a blind Metropolitan

It means
you can't and you can

So you leap in the arms
of the tall blind man

who asks you to repeat

the words again
(before the train comes in)

though now you're so beat you can't open your eyes to speak

or is this being unmanifest?

Robert Strong

Land Management

When we land here, we are America.
There is no separating the beach from its place
in our pioneering consumer consciousness.
There was Sally, who said it smells like sand
in the potato chips. I walk to the water braced
against a vision of milk-fed families in formal wear,
tux cuffs rolled up in the surf. Magnums
and baby blue jewelry boxes sparkle
in the sounds of sunset. Come summer,
tourists will worry about seals on the sand.
Travel only on designated pathways.
It is for Nature's sake we are segregated.
Don't try too hard to tune in. There are trawlers.
The airport. Highway hum. There is a lighthouse
somewhere in this poem. Do you need further aid
to navigation? The Big Dipper's pouring-side
always points toward Polaris: we are now
looking north. Parallax can not be proven
as anything more than our perception,
yet Columbus managed to not discover America.
Some say it was Whitman, did. Some say,
Siberian Snow Wolf. Some say discover
ten times fast and then find it: a trick word,
probably best read in translation
for the non-native speaker. There's something
inherently cheesy about Cape Cod.
I wait on the bike path red-faced, breathing
and defeated as my dog drinks
from the first Pilgrim Spring. Imagine me
with a British accent, by way of Amsterdam,
fairly international yet displeased
with the spiritual state of the world.
Imagine me puking over the gunwales and
glad to have this test from God, seeing this strange
desert thrust like a scythe into saltwater storms.
Perfect place for Puritans with no knack for farming.
Imagine me burning witches, or tarred & feathered,
smirking, for *The Offense of Writing Satanic Verse*.
Imagine me, a Park Ranger, writing tickets
for titties gone naked as savages.

Fur

.....I'm ready to plunge into furs.....and reject the standards of my past.....
.....which allowed no warm furs to enclose.....
.....me and no fur linings.....
.....or strips of fur.....
.....on bare skin.....
.....and I could not bury my face in anything soft
.....as I used to correlate a bad conscience with the.....
.....repetitive circular hand caress of
.....a soothing material.....such as fur.....as I have seen it happen before.....
.....when someone doesn't say anything for 7-9 seconds.....
.....and you observe the cycles.....
.....of their hand through the fur.....
.....or they.....wrap a fur strap around their fists.....until.....
.....the sphere of musing bursts.....and they say.....nothing to you.....
.....which indicates a conscience ensconced.....
.....in a faux solace and limned.....
.....with a relief.....
.....a conscience consumed with an
undisclosed serious concern.....
.....installed in a plush locus.....
.....cannot forgive itself.....and.....
.....surrounds itself with a valence of ermine.....
.....that insists on being stroked with sincere denial.....
.....I still believe in the need for honor and the refusal of fur stoles.....
.....but I forgive.....
.....the desire for an inhuman softness.....
.....as many people are furious with themselves.....
while wearing clothes of the highest quality.....
.....and they are both disgraceful and touchable.....
.....as they caress their sleeves.....and wrap themselves.....
.....or embalm their bad conduct in belly fur.....in the loveless fur void bereft.....
.....of anything except comfort.....

Ronaldo V. Wilson

Brutal End

... Cops say 81-year-old Ruby Jean Johnson was raped and then slain by a crack addict last year in her Harlem Apartment ... *Daily News*

In the photo, my hair blurs into an ovum of ash,
skin smooth as a girl's. The flash finds my eyes,
two tiny white grids, lips betongued

as though I lisp. Punctum:
I am, refuse, my tank top killed.
Killed again, I am

in the A&P, white eyes glow from a
mug coon eyed up to the energizers.

Dead Batteries?

O helpless mute of the tile and flooring. With what to pull
you through the screen of my raped and slain face—

a shovel,
an oyster shucker?

An anagram: *Dou't let the black cat in. He can't let himself out.*

That boy burnt up his grandma.

If our bodies are hieroglyphs,
I sing of the charred robe,
the skins steaming catharsis.

(Avoid savage relatives. Buy a flame retardant robe.)

O vacuities. If we are endless holes,
I claim the discordant. I claim the pigsty.
The split subject.

I claim incommunication.
Not the steel filed down to black dust,
I am the anvil's bow and flat surface:

O jackie, my frames gape, as though skin
ripped open like a face burned by iron
for being beautiful.

I want the spell of cellophane, its clear preserve,
gold hoops sealed in the glass door knob.

Once, on a spoon, I boiled baking soda and water
until they caked, and bore a substance:

in the singed metal, gesticulates

the snow blower—
drives snow into snow,
wind convulsing to matter.

The Unexpected

"We have news," my husband says to his parents.
We're sitting in their living room, near a bay window,
and we're enveloped by a heavenly white light.
"We're not pregnant," my husband announces,
"We've decided not to have a baby this year."

"That's fantastic," his parents say. They stand
and walk toward us, their arms opened like
the wings of great birds. I already have a certain
glow. "How do you feel?" everyone asks me and
I smile. "A little nauseated," I say, "but mostly
alright." My husband's father asks what we
will name it. He is tall and gentle and he places

his hands in his pockets like a child. "We'll
have to wait and see how it doesn't look,"
my husband says, "There's so much of
nothing ahead." A few months later, there is

a shower in our honor. I wear a striped bathing
suit. My husband wears a thong. "Here are
some things you won't need," the relatives say,
"We're so happy for you." We grin and glow
from all the attention. We admire our shiny

new crib, our stroller with detachable car seat,
our rattle, our lifetime supply of pampers.
"Who do you suppose it will look like?" an aunt asks.
"No one we know," my husband assures her.
"Do you think you're ready?" my mother asks.
"It's hard to feel prepared," I say, "So much is unknown."

Everyone nods and I serve a very sweet cake.
It is chocolate with strawberry icing and there
is a picture of the future on top. In the picture,
we are all old or sick or dead and there is a blue
sky overhead. The world goes on without us.

Six months later, we drive to the hospital and sit
in the waiting room smoking an expensive cigar.
We watch some nurses try to revive a man
who has swallowed a bottle of aspirin. He has
white hair and his hands are thick and twisted
like roots. "I feel as if we've been waiting forever,"

my husband says. I tell him to think of how
I feel. Twenty hours later, nothing happens.
We call our parents from the hospital.
"We have news," we say, "We have given birth
to nothing." We all weep together, into our phones,
our puffy faces wet against the receivers.

The next day, everyone comes to our apartment
to have a look. I carry nothing in my arms.
It feels light and heavy all at the same time.
"Our future," my mother says. Her eyes fill
with salt water. The nothing is helpless
and unformed: I feel a deep burning in my heart.

Keith Althaus

From the Pilgrim Monument

for Roger Skillings

Of Dahlem, in Berlin,
where they have the bust of Nefertiti,
Queen of the Nile, I remember
just one thing: a 12th century
ivory carving of a woman in a garden.
As you circle the case
it becomes a skeleton full of worms
in a plot overrun with weeds.

The climb is breathtaking,
the view roughly medieval:
town on one side,
its boat-filled harbor
and traffic clogged streets,
and on the other, graveyards,
mute and still, stretching to the edge
of the moon-like dunes,
which are forever changing,
shifting, being taken away
(the tallest one already halved
since we arrived here thirty years ago),
and nothing added or put back
except beach grass
planted to slow the process,
and a little dust, ashes
of friends who loved it here,
and wanted to stay, or go
wherever it is going.

Michael Craig

Here Comes the Dirty Little Wax Baby

It was no larger than the nodiform basal segment of
the abdomen of
an ant, and yet it was as strong as
any chain and made you laugh.
A peacekeeper, a kind of "peacekeeper" they said,
and then you were asked to put it down.

It looked at first glance
like a suede shoe in the straw
but was actually a very,
very small horse sleeping and its cage
had dents in it that came from the inside.

It was a series of glass vases they called The Sea, each
filled to a different level with a pale blue water.

It was a typewriter. A plain old black metal typewriter.
When you walked past it it blinked and then
a billfold fell out of your pocket and flipped open
on the ground and in it were pictures
of every member in your family.
And they were each of them nailed to a large wooden cross,
which you felt was a bit over the top.

It was a dirty-looking 3 inch 15 dollar wax baby
lying next to a 2 pound crosspein hammer
on a step of a short staircase that
looked like it had not been dusted
off or stepped upon in
30 years. This was perhaps the most interesting
to you— a kind of peck
on the cheek— the museum was closing—

Can You Relax In My House

A felt hat blows end over end across
the wet asphalt. Children
bury pennies in the chest
of a snowman.

A man had been out walking with a very long cigar.
As he passed by me, closely, I could see it
was actually an eight-inch-long ash
that he had, perched beautifully between his
fingers. And that he had passed away.
And that his eyes were gone from his head.

A Poem

The young prince rode through the countryside in his horse-drawn carriage.
Upon coming across a pauper
the young prince called for his driver to stop.
"I need a place to pray," said the pauper.
The young prince removed his dark cape
and threw it down to the pauper: "Pray beneath that."

I'm telling this to Nan and the boys.
The lamp burns dimly. Nan plays with her lighter.
I sit quietly, looking at the faint reflection of my eyeball
in the backside of my monocle.
The young prince

called again to his driver,
"Get down and unharness the horses."
He loaded his pistol.

It's natural, really,
for people to be interested in the childhood of the hero.
You start by pulling down the train
of thought like a thread. This is what affords us
a man walking about in a meadow
before lying down in the wet grass and shooting himself
in the throat. The colors of autumn are still
as they were. Little is changed.
I go back and put tan birds in the trees,
just so we can see them there.

Clark Coolidge

Doctor Death Lets Go

I threw him down on top
of the hole in the home
one temporal cell to cancel
and the ringings of the rock

The lights were out at the lake
the pictures the victrolas
the stop-it-won't-yous
rest put down in flames

he washed the corridor in his cape
scooting past the knowledge ledges
the films of fruit on everything
these omnivorous lulls

Have you seen my cleverness at handling the props?
a master of right-handedness in elevators
rigger of the pendulum tomb the clap
of the iced rainbow click of hate indoors
and wipe the floors

With V. Price in a walk-on part
forgets the number of the bloody
shirts pants smiles stairs

A Chance To Sack God

Guess I'll see things through
my wall cock now on
after they divvy up the oxygen
left standing to throw a shoe
watched the family picture burn down
(somebody told them to stop it)
what are we doing here in the west
where life comes on smeary slides
and the blues are bucking a head wind
nearly construed as what?
like a pressed entertainer
of a nosegay architecture
we played Antarctica
(watched it ripen)
this great orange head in the distance
in diameter (near the ruins)
where the cars go to turn black
a clap and there's a poem!
the evening of the following brain
a squeak and as we listen
this gauzy girl slips out of the frame

Jason Shinder

Every Season

One day I will love.
It will be late.
The stars

will help me.
How I like to be
the only one,

a bull frog
deep in the woods.
And watching

from a distance.
Shadows
of friends.

What am I?
A lovely man?
I don't even want

to die.
Close the window, I say,
already trapped in the glass

but then move
as if moving
from within.

I know
who keeps shifting
the wind.

Angels
with no wings.
I throw seeds

into it—
long boughs
purple lilacs

as if
this is not a world
with too much

on it.
No animals
on the front steps.

Sandy Brown

Still Life: Two People in a River

The Wapsipinicon is a stranger
asking, *Which way to the stadium?* then looking (half-attentively,
in a rush) in the direction toward which your finger points.
We're both in this which-way
question of a river, and you're appraising the unreal
property of such a lusty current when your face turns
toward a drag-
onfly: prophylactic wings a muddle of maraschino, orange & sugar
in an Old-fashioned. (All events and characters
geysering from the Wapsipinicon are real or imagined.)

The jiggled-needle Novocaine of a suffocating late June
afternoon spills its contents, and I'm left lifelike
in a current serious enough to take me if I let it.
(Not just yet.) The heat is dreaming us up and we're watching
contortionist twines of jute measure up to us. In the heat-dream
we call the jute "river." It kisses our ass.

We have to hold branches or else be swept away.
We have left our shoes on the rocky and steep bank, and we can either—

(a wicked bone of poplar lunges up in a wind, punctures the darkening
sky, and draws back
a 500cc amniocentesis of rain)—

stay in the river or get back into our shoes on the bank.
We stay in the river, watching rain dent
the current and become it. I must say beautiful.

Your eyes lip-synch the three-tiered chandelier downpour as you
straddle a mucousy rock and light
a cigarette. Its smoke is a ladder that stops midrung
and disperses. (I go under.
And back up. Everything

is water ...) ...and we're basted under
Helios by a rain that sutures
a river that calls itself Wapsipinicon when it passes.

I could stay here all

day. And why not? The river won't take us (if we keep
to the rocks and branches), and our shoes have already been filled.

Rodney Phillips

Provincetown 10/30/99

This morning I picked up an old copy
of *Provincetown Arts* and in it was a
history of this place or the literary part
anyway. Sooner or later I saw a photo
of everyone I now know. Or almost. Or
a painting or poem. Eileen
wasn't here then, but there was a picture of
Nick years ago and one of Marie before
they both became who they are now. Or at least
before I knew them. There is some thing about
this that makes me really sad. Not remembering
particular events for instance, because you weren't
there. You know how you can sometimes make up
memories by mistake or because of some unknown
desire. There aren't really any time machines
you know, or despite Cher, any turning back of
time. There are only memories of people I never
knew or places that never were. Then I saw the picture
of John and Yoko on the wall and decided
that it would be nice to know someone
who no one else ever knew.

P o e t ' s B i o s

Keith Althaus' book of poems, *Rival Heavens*, was published by Provincetown Arts Press in 1993, and was reissued in a trade edition in 1999. He has taught in the Fall Seniors Program at Castle Hill in Truro, and will teach at Provincetown International Art Institute this year. He has poems forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, and lives in North Truro.

Rae Armantrout's most recent books of poetry are *Made To Seem* (Sun and Moon, 1995) and *The Pretext* (Green Integer, 2000). *Veil: New and Selected Poems* is due out from Wesleyan in 2001. Armantrout teaches writing at the University of California, San Diego.

Paulette Beete's work has appeared in *Callaloo*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Third Coast*, *Rhino* and *Shankpainter* 40. She grew up in New York, lives in Chicago, and was a 1999-2000 writing fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

Sandy Brown: "I got that poetry MFA from U of I. I was a finalist in the Yale in '97. A poem of mine was an honorable mention at U of H for that Academy of American Poets little prize thingie. I went to U of H for fiction but bailed. I got a rinky dinky MD council on the arts state grant in '93, but problem is that I wanted to submit for poetry and fiction but could only do one, so I submitted poetry in my name and fiction in my mom's name, and the fiction won. So it's not really even a grant I can claim, lest the micropossibility that I face legal charges. I've taught. My biggest accomplishment is that I had five poems published in a magazine called *Fence*. (You may have heard of it.)"

Michael Burkard has poems recently in *Fence*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Lomsville Review*. Sarabande Books is putting out *Unsleeping* in February 2001, and New Issues Press will be putting out a previously unpublished collection from 1986 entitled *Pennsylvania Collection Agency*. He lives in upstate New York and is a part-time resident of Provincetown.

Clark Coolidge is the author of over thirty books of poetry and criticism, the most recent of which are *Alien Tatters* (Atelos Press), *Bomb* (Granary Books) and *Now It's Jazz* (Living Badge Press). He has recently re-relocated to California.

Michael Craig was raised in Dayton, Ohio. He has since lived in Montana, Wyoming, Massachusetts, and now makes his home again in Montana, town of Red Lodge, where he is a farrier, a shoer of horses. He has recently completed his first manuscript of poems, *Private Mule*.

Nick Fillmore, co-founder and publisher of *SQUiD* (semi-defunct and apocryphal Provincetown publication), is currently working on a screenplay and looking for a publisher for a completed manuscript of poems—*The Most Amazing Color was White*—a finalist in the UMass Juniper Prize competition. "I'm looking forward to coming back to Provincetown after several years away ... with all the pre-date jitters of a reunion with a beautiful woman with whom one has a dark and violent past."

Fanny Howe is the author of several collections of poems, including the most recent, *One Crossed Out* from Graywolf Press and *Selected Poems* from University of California Press. She is also the author of a novel, *Nod*, and teaches at UC, San Diego.

Kathe Izzo is a poet, filmmaker, mother, and performance artist living in Provincetown. She is completing a novel, *Hummer*—the inside story of a fifteen-year-old girl exploring art, numbness, survival, and gender.

Chelsey Minnis lives in Littleton, Colorado. Her poem, "Tiger," was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Rodney Phillips, a poet living in New York City, is author (with others) of *Hand of the Poet: Poems and Papers in Manuscript* (Rizzoli, 1997) and *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980* (Granary Books, 1998). His poems have appeared in *Fence*, *Western Humanities Review*, and soon will appear in *Paris Review*. He is currently Director of the Humanities and Social Sciences Library of the New York Public Library.

Faith Shearin is an English teacher in Detroit. Her poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *New York Quarterly*, and the *Chicago Review*, among others. She was a fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown and writer-in-residence at the Interlochen Arts Academy. Her work is forthcoming in *The Third Coast: an Anthology of Michigan Poets*.

Jason Shinder's new book of poems, *Among Women*, is forthcoming in April, 2001 from Graywolf Press. His most recent anthology, *Tales From The Couch: Writers on the Talking Cure* is forthcoming in December, 2000 from HarperCollins. A teacher in the graduate writing programs at Bennington College and the New School for Social Research, he is the founder and director of the YMCA National Writer's Voice and is the Literary Arts Director at Sundance Institute. A former fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, he spends most of his time in Provincetown and New York City.

Robert Strong lives in Truro and New York City. "Land Management" is from poems written in collaboration with the C-Scape dune shack.

J.E.Wei is a SUNY creative writing fellow and a Ph.D. student at the State University of New York, Binghamton. His work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *James White Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Mankato Poetry Review*, *Thorny Locust*, and an anthology, *Earth Shattering Poems* (Henry Holt). He has also received the A & B Walker Scholarship from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown where he spent two summers studying poetry and painting.

Ronaldo V. Wilson is a graduate of New York University's creative writing program and the University of California at Berkeley. He is also a Ph.D. candidate in English at the CUNY Graduate Center. His poetry appears, most recently, in *Beyond the Frontier*, *Cave Canem III* and *IV*, and *Harvard Review*. He was a 1999-2000 fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

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I'll Hold You Up

RUTH HAMEL

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LAURA AND WARD PICKED EACH OTHER out of the end-of-the-summer party, spent the night at her apartment, then decided to drive naked to the ocean, one hundred and fifty miles away. They had fallen in love.

But they started too late to make good time. Labor Day traffic out of Washington was thick; Ward and Laura crawled along, as sweaty and frustrated as everyone else, as downtown slowly gave way to slums, warehouses and suburbs. No one, not even truck drivers, noticed that the couple in the red Miata wore no clothes.

Laura wore her suit of sunlight easily. Her legs rubbed cat-like against the velour car seat, and her inky hair lifted and streamed in the blowing air. Her eyes were closed against the noon glare because she'd refused to compromise her nakedness with sunglasses. To Laura's dismay, Ward had insisted upon wearing his shoes, big gray hiking boots that clung to his ankles like twin buckets of cement. It was dangerous to drive barefoot, he said.

The summer had left Ward patched with color—conquistador brown on his shoulders and calves, newborn pink on his peeling cheekbones, drowned white around his hips. He steered with his hands set in the 10-to-2 driver's ed. position.

He said, "This is like those dreams where suddenly you're nude, but nobody sees you. But still you try to hide."

"I don't try to hide," Laura said, loftily, lying.

She was in a faint bad humor, partly because of her hangover, which had left her jittery and ashamed, and partly because her leavened mood of the dawn had burned away. The holiday was a grinding machine. They were pressed on every side by speedboats, jet skis, pickup trucks loaded with beer kegs and dogs, everyone hurtling toward the shore for the last day of summer.

She twisted the ruby ring she'd bought herself, with a promise to do well, when she'd moved to Washington the year before. She was trying to remember, through all the wind and highway fumes, the moment just before sunrise when she knew she was in love. Laura didn't doubt the moment, but she was having trouble locating it.

She must have looked worried, because Ward reached over the gear shift and took her hand, just for a second. Then by silent mutual consent they pulled apart. They were shy. They didn't know each other.

It had been the last party of the season, at the Georgetown condo of somebody's friend. There were Hawaiian shirts, tequila shooters, "Louie, Louie" played thirteen times on four pairs of speakers. That late in the season, most people were too tired to meet anyone new, so they hung in their habitual work cliques. They all worked hard, in government offices and law firms, at jobs they hoped soon to rise above. They were all turning thirty, to their own surprise.

Laura always felt anxious at Labor Day, when the year took a perceptible downward drop into grayness, chill and New Year's resolutions. Nothing heralded the arrival of this bleak season more than the muscular dystrophy telethon. So when the party hostess insisted that everyone gather around her bedroom TV to watch the first few moments of the show, Laura hung back in the living room, alone, hiding from Jerry Lewis and his nervous, bitter eyes.

She drank a beer. She ate a taco. She eavesdropped on the laughter in the next room. Then she noticed the man on the balcony. He was soft-shouldered but tall, his white shirttails were loose, and he was stretching out his arms like seagull wings.

Laura crept up to the other side of the balcony door, and saw that he was playing airplane. Passenger jets were descending overhead, low and heavy, on their approach down the Potomac to the airport; he was helping them land, pressing down the air with his palms, dipping his knees. A boyish rag of hair hung on his collar. Laura thought he must be someone's disturbed brother, then she noticed the expensive crumpling of his shirt and the complex laces of his hiking boots.

She stood behind the door, studying him, with the sinking sun in her eyes and Jerry Lewis cackling at her back. When he turned and saw her, she was smiling, in pure relief.

Summer wasn't over yet.

Laura was the one who wanted to ride naked to the shore. They took her car, but Ward had agreed to drive, just as he had agreed to skip breakfast and not to tell her about himself, not yet.

Laura hadn't wanted to drive because she'd wanted no distraction from her first day in love in more than a year. She thought that the car trip with Ward would be one long quiver of desire. But as soon as they hit traffic, their heads started to ache. Their genitals, so large and commanding in the dark, shrank in the daylight until they could barely be seen amid all the workaday limbs.

This surprising lack of lust gave Laura plenty of time to think, but it was difficult to think through her hangover, and hard to watch the passing scenery through the scalding sunlight. So she hung her head and inspected her body, which was overexposed and line-free in the brightness. She did daily exercises to keep tight. Ward was long-boned but a bit loose around the middle. He had soft baby hair and a habit of patting his chest, or maybe his heart, every few minutes. Laura kept sweeping him with her eyes, trying to harvest lovable details, but she could not stop noticing his heavy, tightly laced boots.

They hadn't talked much at the party. Mainly they'd stood at the edges of other people's conversations, smiling at one another. After, they walked the long way back to her apartment, weaving through the darkening, dangerous streets. Ward began to offer the usual career and romantic information, but Laura pinched his lips shut. "None of this matters yet," she said, and he agreed that what mattered was them, that moment. They bought a bottle of strawberry wine and a pack of Marlboros, and they walked along holding hands and blowing amateur smoke rings. They pretended that they were strolling through Laura's brain, that the cars were her thoughts and the wires were her nerves, then she said, "No, it's my heart," so Ward closed his eyes and walked a whole block of sidewalk without stepping on a crack. In gratitude, Laura turned a shaky cartwheel, called up from her cheerleading days. Ward responded with a yodel and a handspring. Then Laura tightrope-walked down a low spiked fence, six steps, then she jumped into Ward's arms and he twirled her around like a baby or a toy plane before setting her on his shoulders, which were soft but broad. She rode there the rest of the way home, high above him, grabbing at tree branches and their tough, late-summer leaves.

"Laura?" He spoke her name experimentally, tasting it. "We forgot to sleep last night."

She was watching housing developments slowly surrender to cornfields and truck stops. They were halfway there. "I haven't really slept since before I went to college."

"Ha!" He tapped her arm. "I caught you telling a fact. That means I can tell you one."

"One." She shifted her sweaty thighs on the velour.

"OK." He considered, patting his heart. "I've had three jobs in three states in three years." He waited for her to ask for details, but she only nodded and turned back to the window.

Every time it began the same, with these eager proffered facts, and ended the same, in confusion and reproach. What good would it do him to know that she had been engaged twice and spent her days writing press releases for the gravel association? What mattered—that her job frightened her, that somehow in the past year the tables had turned and now her mother was calling *her* to cry and complain—these things could not be told to a new lover, not yet.

What difference did it make if he loved flying, hated asparagus, was an aspiring lobbyist or a disillusioned Democrat? It was much nicer to contemplate the whole man, his cellophane wrap unbroken, his hopes and history neatly arranged inside him like rows of imported chocolates.

This was Laura's theory. But in practice she was unable to see Ward as a whole man, as an agreeable man, or even as the boyish helper of planes. She could only see him as a foot, lazily riding the accelerator of her car. They were stuck in the slow lane, their front view blocked by the square behind of a Winnebago, even though there was plenty of room to pass.

If only they could be there.

They had clutched each other, hearts galloping, lungs beating; they had risen on their own hot dry chant, *I love you I love you*, until the room was full and stretched like a balloon and they couldn't stand it anymore, they burst naked out of Laura's apartment into the bright, airy day. They laughed and pushed each other forward, yelping as their bare feet struck the pavement. They ran for her car and drove three blocks before they thought to go back for some money and clothes, and Ward's boots.

Now the sun was slipping behind the car and Laura was back in the shadows. The lines had reappeared on her neck and wrists. Her body looked like any other outfit, and tomorrow she had to write another press release on another issue she didn't understand. Out her window she saw the same vegetable stands, mockingly repeating themselves, the same truck stops, the same slow-creeping Winnebago—

"Ward?" She touched the skin of his shoulder, felt him flinch beneath her strange touch. "Let me drive."

That was better. She drove seventy-five miles an hour, her spirits rising as the speed drilled up through the sole of her foot.

Ward did his best not to betray alarm at her driving, but he managed at every turn to sneak in unspoken facts about himself. When they passed some bicyclists, he pumped his fist at them in a fraternal salute. He tuned in a radio opera and sang the party song from *La Traviata* in what sounded like genuine Italian.



Laura was just starting to get annoyed when she passed an accident and he begged her to stop the car. "We'd better help them," he said.

"Ward." She pointed at his bare crotch.

"I'll put on a towel. You can stay in the car."

"The police are already there." But she pulled off the highway and backed up on the gravelly shoulder.

A silver sports car lay in the ditch weeds, upside down and faintly smoking. A state trooper was leaning down to talk to a young woman sitting in the dirt with her curly head in her hands. She looked unhurt but heart-

broken. Laura watched Ward tighten the pink beach towel around his waist, stride up to the wreck, and offer his help. Both the girl and the trooper waved him away without looking at him. Ward hesitated at the edge of the accident for a moment, then he picked up a plastic cooler from the belongings scattered in the ditch. He walked up to the girl, who still stared down at the dirt, and quietly set the cooler at her feet.

Back in his seat, he peeled off the towel and shyly smiled at his kneecaps. "I guess that was pretty stupid."

"In a good way." Laura smiled at the side of his face, and stepped on the gas.

Passing by a shopping plaza in Maryland, she got an idea. "Are you hungry?" she said.

"No, my stomach's still a little weak from the shooters."

"Well, I'm going to try something." She made a U-turn and pulled up to the drive-through window of a Burger King, where she ordered twelve dollars worth of food and received it without a glance from the cashier. Next she stopped at a bank and hobbled twenty feet across a gravel lot to withdraw cash from the machine. Again, nobody seemed to notice. "Don't people see anything but themselves?" Laura asked Ward, exasperated.

"I do," he said. He laid a tentative palm on her thigh, but she was determined—she got back on the highway, pushed the car up to eighty, and didn't slow down until she saw a picnic area by the side of the road.

Ward said, "Is this smart?"

"Who cares?" She pushed open her door, gathering up a stadium blanket and the Burger King bag. "I'm hungry and hot, and I guess we know we're invisible. And it's still goddamn summer."

Ward waited for a truck to pass, then darted out of the car and dove on to the blanket, which Laura had spread on a bristly patch of grass. There wasn't

much to the picnic area, just a peeling table, a cold campfire, and an embankment down to an evaporated river.

"We aren't going to make it to the beach," he said.

"I don't mind. I just wanted the ride, didn't you?" Laura was happy to be outside, even though cars were flying past them with blind indifference. She picked apart a cheeseburger and fed it to Ward. He let her take off his boots and rub his feet, which were long and surprisingly delicate. He pressed his thumb against her shoulder, watched his white print dissolve on a field of scarlet. "You're burning up," he said. Then, "I can't remember why we're doing this."

"Because we're madly in love."

"Oh. Right."

They laughed. Laura stretched out, listening to crows and traffic. "I liked what you did for that girl back there. And I liked you yesterday, with the planes."

"Eeh." He pulled his forearm up to hide his face. "I was pretty drunk."

"You're kind without having to stop and think about it. But I was drunk too."

"I can't drink anymore. I shouldn't."

"Me neither."

They fell asleep pressed together, heedless of the dropping sun and the rising breeze. Laura dreamed the ocean had her in its warm salt clutch and was bouncing her, rocking her; she was a baby fish, then an old shell-bone. Then she was plummeting through cold air onto a field of iron spikes.

She twisted and opened her eyes and saw a charred stick jabbing her shoulder, wielded by a hook-necked old woman in a heavy coat. "I thought you were dead," the woman said, calmly. "I said, 'Randall, only two dead people could enjoy this wind.'" A spotted old man stood behind her. He was also dressed for winter, in a hunting jacket and flap-eared cap. A fat dachshund squirmed in his arms.

"Aren't you cold?" the woman said.

Ward tried to cover himself with the edge of the blanket. Laura glared at the old people, proud and defiant. "We have nothing to be ashamed of," she said.

"Not yet, I'm sure you don't," the woman said. "We don't mind, do we, Randall?"

The old man kicked Ward's bare ankle. "Far from it."

The old people sat down at the picnic table, pulled out a thermos and a stack of sandwiches, and began to eat, taking very large bites, while their dog trotted over to Laura and Ward. It was prickly and plump, and it smelled bad. Laura screamed softly when it tried to lie across her legs. The woman looked over and laughed. "Barney, are you getting fresh with that poor girl?"

"We should go," Ward said.

"No way." Laura's face was a stubborn stone. She moved closer to Ward, away from the dog, which lay in a panting tube on the grass.

The old people concentrated upon their food and did not seem to give the naked young couple another thought. Still, Laura and Ward began to feel embarrassed by their bodies. Ward put up a hand to cover his bald spot, a velvety pink patch the size of a poker chip. Laura suddenly worried that her bottom sagged, and rolled over to hide it.

I'll hold you up. That was it, the moment she had been trying to remember. They'd lain tangled together at the foot of her bed, lost in the dark. She'd said, "I'm afraid," and he'd said, "I'll hold you up"—urgent, a promise—and she'd believed him.

A cool wind was sweeping up trash and leaves and campfire grit. Laura's burned skin made her shiver. She wanted the ocean, the warm one she'd just dreamed about.

The old people finished their meal. They brushed off crumbs, kissed each other on the mouth, called Barney, and drove away without so much as a glance at Laura and Ward.

Silently they got dressed, crouched by the side of the car, concealed from the road. Ward put on his stale party clothes of the day before, but Laura had brought a new sunsuit she'd found in the Juniors department—gum-pink with a pattern of beach balls and surfboards. When she saw Ward staring at

the outfit, she wanted to cross her arms over her chest and hide herself. But she only sighed and shrugged.

"It's all right," he said. "I like it."

This hollow, husbandly lie touched her, but in a different way from the sidewalk antics of the night before. "I've changed my mind again," she said. "I really need that ocean now."

He stopped stuffing his shirt into his jeans, glanced at the pink western sky. "It will be dark before we know it. And I have an early meeting tomorrow."

She rubbed her feverish arms. "We can make it back in plenty of time. I'll drive. Please."

He stroked the bright fabric of her sunsuit, soothing her, stalling.

The wind churned around them. "Please," she said. "You can tell me everything. Every job and girl and stupid thing you've done. And next time we'll do what you want."

"Next time, huh?" But he knelt in the gravel to put on his boots, biting his tongue in concentration as he double-knotted the laces. He couldn't have looked clumsier or denser, but Laura started feeling it again, the low pulse of desire, marbled now with a strange tenderness that may have been pity.

Ward tied his right boot, saw her looking down at him.

"They're good for rough hikes. Maybe I'll take you, next time."

"Please," she said.

Ruth Hamel's stories have been published by The Kenyon Review, The Missouri Review, Northwest Review, Press, New Orleans Review, Ascent, and other magazines. She is currently working on a novel.

Falcon

BENJAMIN TAYLOR

BLESS YOU, BABYLON. dicey, overripe, his place to start from, that was New Orleans. The rabbi's son had himself a full ride to a college he liked the name of, even if considered hard to say by friends and relations. Came the end of August, time to go, while in the great world here is what went on: at Tansonnhut Airfield, Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew praised the South Vietnamese for "suffering so much in freedom's cause," pledged "no lessening" of American support, and added that "the Cambodian situation seems to be developing very well."



Janis Joplin flew home to Port Arthur for her tenth high school reunion. On Block Island twelve FBI agents, posing as bird watchers, nabbed Father Daniel Berrigan, a fugitive from justice since his conviction on charges of destroying Selective Service documents. By the banks of the Perdenales, former President and Mrs. Lyndon Johnson enjoyed a private screening of *Patton*, the hit movie of the summer. In San Francisco, Benjamin Bufano, who fifty-three years earlier had protested

America's entry into the Great War by severing his trigger finger and sending it to Woodrow Wilson, died in obscurity.

While in New Orleans, Dr. Sheldon Kretchmar, pediatrician, booster, the worst, the noisiest Nixon-lover in town, pillar of the American Medical Association, who'd seen Gabriel Geismar through chicken pox, scarlet fever, mumps and, in early adolescence, a spell of asthma so severe it had led to pneumonia, looking down the youth's throat one last time, said, "Tulane or LSU?"

Neither. Gabriel named the college of his choice as best he could with a depressor on his tongue. Dr. Kretchmar took it out. "Swarthmore," the rabbi's son repeated.

Kretchmar revolved the name. "Never heard of it."

"Swarthmore college, sir, in the suburbs of Philadelphia, and a grand looking place by the brochure they send."

"Well, I've never heard—"

"It's a liberal arts college." Kretchmar looked him up and down, seeing not less than another Julius Rosenberg in the making; wished Gabriel all the best.

After any doctor's appointment, even with the dentist or the optician, when Gabriel came home the rabbi would ask, "Did he look down your throat? Did he look up your address?"—which when Gabe was little he'd thought funny. But how many years in a row can you laugh at the same joke? Rabbi Milton Geismar, like fathers generally, rehearsed all quips till they stood there embodied and part of the furniture.

"Dad, *please!*" Gabriel clutched his fingers to his temples. "You've been saying that since I don't know when."

"Nonsense, son, I just now thought it up."

Gabriel shuddered, ground his teeth, took a valedictory ride to town on the St. Charles Avenue streetcar, got off where the track turns around at Poydras, walked along Chartres, then briskly down Toulouse, looking for an infamous low green door in the wall. A gentleman in a public facility at the levee had told him this was the place. You paid your money, you went in, you had yourself some fun.

He paid his money, he went in. He stripped down to nothing at the locker provided, then thought better of it and pulled his briefs back on to restrain the bare fact, for this den excited at once with its miscellany of smells, an omnium gatherum—musky, civety, Liederkranzy, commingled with alcoholic exhalations and with steam—of what a celebrated periodical of the day only boasted of being but these baths verily were: man at his best. (Told that that magazine was for "the man's man" and utterly misunderstanding the phrase, Gabriel had hurried off to buy a copy. Any mention of the word man stirred him. Even a copy of Reinhold Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man*, found one airless afternoon on his father's highest shelf, had merited ten minutes of browsing through.)

He entered the warren of cubicles, moving briskly as he could through the corridors of men with towels around their middles. Each open door framed in the variable light a bare boy or man, some recumbent on cots, some standing; and some showing off. As for the closed doors, they were also very interesting. Gabriel had an impulse to knock, hearing noises from behind one of them, but thought better of it.

Farther down the corridor a black man tossed his head side to side, said as Gabriel passed by, "Git in here, sugar," and beckoned with an authoritative motion of the arm—assured, official even, as if directing traffic in an emergency.

Which this was. He asked in the courtliest way if he could take Gabriel's underwear off. This is what they mean by den of iniquity, Gabriel told himself. I like it. But eight seconds later, having moaned and shuddered out of this beside-himself self back into his real and habitual one, waked up from pleasure, he felt another way entirely and pushed the nappy head aside, yanked up his underwear and wished hell for leather to be out of there. His mind veered to numbers, clean things, the cleanest indeed anywhere in or out of this world. Primes, for instance, the haughtily exclusive category of those quantities divisible only by themselves. And perfects, perfect on account of being equal to the sum of their divisors. And amicable, two numbers each of which is equal to the sum of all the exact divisors of the other except the number itself. On these latter it was a particular pleasure to dwell. 220 and 284 for instance. Gabriel added the divisors, just to confirm 220's amicability— $(1 + 2 + 4 + 71 + 142)$, like that, then those of 284 $(1 + 2 + 4 + 5 + 10 + 11 + 20 + 22 + 44 + 55 + 110)$. Easy in your head. But now try 17,296 and 18,416. Some four hundred such pairs of amicable numbers have been discovered, with more out there certainly. But whether the number of amicables is finite or infinite nobody has yet nailed down. And wouldn't it, Gabriel thought, be fun to know.

There was where he returned to, the frontier he reconnoitered: infinity. The physical universe may or may not be a case of it. But the mind, as attested by calculation of any irrational number to the *n*th decimal place, plainly was. And this was the real fun, according to Gabriel Geismar, embodied passion being but the other fun. Now the worshipper on the floor, exultant in his degradation, kissed Gabriel's hand, his poor put-upon left one, then drew back, asked the inevitable question, "Wass wrong witch yuh hand?"

"Born that way." The standard answer he gave.

"Don't make no diffunce."

But it had, it did. For such an irregularity little allowance is made. At regular intervals, from cradle to grave, you must be reminded. The littlest thing, really, an error of some kind in the genetic manufacture of him—on his left hand Gabriel Geismar had two thumbs, absolutely identical, down to the moons in the nail beds and the lines across the knuckles. Conjoined Siamese-style, functioning perfectly well as one, they had yet drawn the stares and incredulity of the world (of New Orleans, that is) and made for Gabriel Geismar a destiny.

"Look to me like when you see some turnip or tomatoh or maybe radish, you know, trying to turn into two. Dass what it look to me like." And now the black man bestowed a kiss specifically on the thumbs. "Wass yuh name?"

No answer.

"Wass yuh name?"

"Um, Forrest, Forrest Delavoy," Gabriel lied, pressing into service the name of a detested classmate at the New Orleans Country Day School.

"Fahrust Dee-la-voy! I do like that name."

Gabriel made to leave, shaking the man's hand, business-like; but the rich irony of this caused a laugh to well up in both of them.

"Don't say goodnight, sugar."

"I've got to go somewhere tomorrow morning."

"Where you goin'?"

"Pennsylvania."

"Pensuhvairiyuh? Lawd! You college boy?"

"I am."

"Ha! Knew it even witch yuh clothes off. How come you go way up there?" the man asked, getting to his feet.

Gabriel shrugged and said, "I've got to head home now."

"You ain't even aksed my name."

No, indeed. Gabriel had wanted this man nameless as a cloud or clump of earth.

"My name Clarence Rappley."

"Good to know you," Gabriel said, and the saying so seemed to scatter his resistance a little. Seeing this, Clarence helped himself to a kiss; and though Gabriel intended it to be closemouthed and brief, that kiss lingered out, opened up, tasted good.

"Les go back to my crib." Here Clarence showed his pretty teeth.

"Home with you?" Along the alley behind the house on Terpsichore, owned by the synagogue and furnished to Rabbi Geismar and where Gabriel had been brought up, were servants' quarters he'd been in and out of all his life. For want of a better frame of reference, he imagined Clarence Rappley residing in one of these with eight or ten siblings and a wits-ended mother. This is what life in the alley had been—makeshift, volatile, unfreshened, colored existence as it struggled up and gave out. Home with Clarence Rappley? No, no. "No."

"Yuh place?"

His place, excellent, with a rabbi and rebbitsin asleep down the hall. "No, Clarence."

"Maybe you jus lemme walk you home."

Getting shut of Clarence Rappley would not be so easy as saying no. "All right, then."

"Go put yuh clothes on."

They walked up Toulouse, then down Bourbon, not saying much, drawing only an occasional stare from the milling, gabbing, falling-down throng—Texans, Arkansans, et cetera, tourists out for a big time, some of them by that hour relaxing in the gutter, in their vomit. These revelers were busy, didn't care much what a little Jew and a big Negro were doing on the town.

At the edge of the Quarter, Gabriel again tried to take his leave. "So happens I be goin yuh way," was what Clarence Rappley told him. "What street yuh live on?"

"Josephine," Gabriel lied.

"Ain't that a coinkidink! I jest happen to be goin to Josephine myself!"

So at St. Charles and Poydras they boarded the streetcar, in which people did stare. Clarence outpaced them. "Nice night if it don't rain!" He took the seat beside Gabriel and threw a companionate arm around him. "Stop it!" Gabriel hissed. A marmish blond lady made a small mouth at them. A man in



a seersucker suit and white shoes and a boater looked interested. A freckle-faced black woman fixed a glittering eye on Gabriel's supernumerary thumb. He leapt up, made for the other side of the car. "I don't even know this man! He's followed me all the way from Toulou—I mean from Chartres Street. He's harassing me!"

"Call da po-lice, you so upset," suggested the freckle-faced woman, and let out a laugh.

"Dass right, dawlin, call em," said Clarence.

The seersuckered man, who'd been screening himself with the day's *Picayune*, kept peering over it. Everyone grew silent, waiting for the other shoe to fall, but before it could a loutish low-class character from the front end, availing himself of the circumstance that these two blacks were the only ones on board, yelled, "You jigaboos shut up! And you there, you pipe down too. Don't know him—in a pig's ass you don't!"

With that the seersuckered gent disappeared altogether behind his *Picayune*. Gabriel pulled the cord, quickstepped from the car at Lee Circle. Head lowered, bullish, Clarence Rappley followed.

Now Gabriel flew down Howard, Clarence hollering after him the plain truth: "You cahwud! Cahwud what you is, Fahrust Delavoy! If that's even yuh name! Cause it sound mighty phony to me!" Storming on, not turning round, Gabriel noticed he couldn't see the pavement for tears starting into his eyes, couldn't have spoken if he'd tried, but turned now to face his rightful accuser. Clarence slapped at the air, then made as if to punch Gabriel, right left right but careful that the blows fell short, and was upon him in an ironbound hug. Gabriel wriggled a moment. Clarence Rappley set him free ...

Like an uncupped bird he flew, veering for home, there to put all real events behind him. He took out his mathematical diary, put down a few random things which had occurred to him that day—two or three indeed having germinated even as he ran the rest of the way down St. Charles, then up Terpsichore. Ah, now for calculability, sweet detachment from the corporeal universe and its demands; here in the abstract manipulation of symbols of quantity according to unchangeable rules was the freest of feelings. Integers, fractions, reals, imaginaries, transcendentals.

Bliss.

Tonight, a little fun outside the boundaries of three-dimensional space, while the heavens churn around him, while in other galaxies, worlds beyond us, other minds behold in who knows how many dimensions. Beyond us, though not utterly—we can with symbols exploit these dimensions by orders of magnitude up to the *n*th. Before bed Gabriel puts himself through his non-Euclidean paces, watching the demonstrations lengthen out on the diary page. He is a falcon with the hood still on. He calculates in his darkness. And how is it, he wonders, that whatever is matter or energy is numerical? Whence this unstinting *effectiveness* of numbers? The answer to that is so deeply hidden that this our average solar system may well expire, its star out of fuel, before we or some post-anthropic intelligence of the earthspeck find out. The why of it may forever be too hard, the way arithmetic is too hard for earthworms.

New Orleans outside his window had settled down. Gabriel did the last of his packing, brushed his teeth, climbed in bed. He recalled for the first time in more than an hour that he had three thumbs instead of two. And at the instant of nodding off heard a voice say, "Wass wrong witch yuh hand?" and "Don't make no diffunce." The night freshened, then turned to rain. And now all the Gabriels, on such timid terms with one another by day, broke together the bread of sleep. A covey of bobwhites settled onto the rabbinical back lawn; picked and nattered, *bob-WHITE*, *poor-hob-WHITE*; went away.

Bless you, Babylon.

Benjamin Taylor has contributed to magazines including Bookforum, BOMB, the Los Angeles Times Book Review, and Threepenny Review. He teaches at the New School for Social Research and Bennington College and is the author of a book of essays, Into the Open: Reflections on Genius and Modernity, and a novel, Tales Out of School, which received the Harold Ribalow Prize.

Justice

KATHERINE TOY MILLER



Sarah's twenty-year-old assistant, Jill, has been working for her for two weeks. They get along, but not famously. Sarah runs the back room of a small newspaper print shop in Los Angeles and develops the photographs. Jill does the layout.

On Monday Sarah notices Jill talking to the delivery boy, Mike, a kid just out of high school waiting for summer to end so he can play college football. With his beefy arms folded across his beefy chest, he seems to have the muscles and the confidence. Jill, with her round breasts thrust up and her round butt thrust out, smiles at him like a doll-shaped sucker waiting to be licked, an obsequious pose she never concocts for Sarah. Ten minutes later they are still talking, and the pressmen are waiting for something to do.

"Jill, you'd better get those ads typed up," Sarah shouts as she throws down a stack of newspapers on the counter.

Jill smiles and motions her hand in Sarah's direction but keeps talking. Sarah looks at her again. Jill waves goodbye to Mike and sits at her computer. Soon Sarah hears Jill laughing with the secretary. Sarah wraps a string around a bundle of papers and pulls until the string breaks.

"Ey, mi novia," Carlos, a little Chicano guy, says to Sarah as he stuffs in inserts. "Una mal chica." He nods towards Jill.

Sarah smiles at him and redoes the string.

•

In the courtyard of her apartment complex Sarah's neighbor boys, Lonnie and Nicholas, are playing. They are both blue-eyed blondes but look nothing alike.

Nicholas, the younger one, the one she likes best, asks, "Can I wash your car?" He has a round baby face.

Lonnie, whose face is long and thin, adopts a girlish pout as he pulls the petals off a flower he picked from the flower bed. Lonnie does not like to wash cars. He knows it makes him look bad because Nicholas does.

Sarah shakes her head. "No, it's too late." It is almost dark.

"Uuhhhh," Nicholas says, slapping his forehead. "We're bored." Their mother doesn't have enough money to keep them entertained. They don't even have bicycles.

Sarah looks at them with pity. "I'm sorry," she says.

That evening she is watching something that takes place at a home for battered children, perhaps a light drama. The children play touch football on the lawn with their crutches and broken arms while their parents, supervised by a counselor, have breakdowns and confrontations on the living room couch. The doorbell rings, and she gets up to answer it.

"Can we play with your computer?" Lonnie asks.

"No. It isn't working very well." The mouse is fried.

"Well, can we color then?" Nicholas says.

She lets them in. They run across the room to her art supplies.

"Does your mother know you're here?" Their mother was a drug addict. They grew up in welfare motels. Now she is a born-again Christian and keeps tight control on them.

Nicholas makes big eyes at her and nods. "She told us to come here." This is probably a lie, but if Sarah calls his mother and it is, he will get in trouble.

A few minutes later while she is taping Nicholas's picture of an American flag with pink stars and green stripes to the refrigerator, Lonnie comes in with his drawing of her. She has a nose like a pig and a smile like a watermelon-shaped slice of board fence. "Sarah is pretty," it says.

"That's nice," she tells Lonnie.

"Zack is the best artist in my class," he says. "And he is the cutest boy. I just love him." He rolls his eyes and gazes at the ceiling.

In the morning Sarah finds Jill talking to Mike again. This time Jill is working though Mike isn't. Bundles of papers are waiting to be taken out. Sarah watches as Mike and Jill kiss goodbye. She has also watched Jill kiss her boyfriend goodbye. It looks the same.

That afternoon when Sarah goes into the darkroom, Jill and Mike are making out in the corner. They smile at her. She closes the door and waits for them to come out.

The big boss, Mr. Reynolds, walks by. "What's going on, Sarah?"

"Oh, nothing. Just waiting for something to develop."

"Well, find something to do."

"Sure, okay."

After he leaves, Sarah opens the door again. They giggle, and Mike's belt buckle drops against the concrete. "Get the hell out of there," she yells. She shuts the door.

When they come out, Sarah says, "All right, you guys. I don't want this to happen again."

"Sure, all right," Mike says. He puts his arm around Jill's waist and looks down at Sarah with his head cocked back.

Mr. Reynolds comes up again. "Jill, I've been looking for you. Could you come to my office for a minute? I've got a new ad campaign I want to discuss with you."

"Certainly, Mr. Reynolds." Jill smiles at Sarah then at Mike. Mike takes his hand off her butt.

"I'd just love to work on a new project," she says to Mr. Reynolds as they walk away.

Inside the darkroom Sarah kicks the boxes of chemicals.

Lonnie and Nicholas are wandering around the carport when Sarah drives in.

"Take us to McDonald's!" Nicholas yells, running towards her car.

"I don't have any money." This is true. She had to have her car repaired so her checking account is empty, and she cut up her credit cards so she wouldn't overspend.

"Yes, you *do*," Lonnie says in a snooty tone, one hand on his hip, one shoulder thrust forward, his chin in the air. "You just don't like us."

"She likes us," Nicholas says. "She's the only friend we've got."

She invites them into her apartment for ice tea. They watch as she assembles everything.

"This is pretty," Lonnie says, tracing his finger over the design on the china sugar bowl. He holds it over the floor. "If I drop it, it would break, huh?"

She wants to grab it from him. He sees the distrust in her eyes and deliberately pours sugar onto the linoleum.

"Lonnie, clean that up!" she shouts.

Lonnie shakes his head, puts the bowl on the counter, and runs out the door.

"I'll clean it up," Nicholas says. "I always have to clean up after him. He's lazy." He heads to the broom closet, walking like a farmer going to pitch hay. He never misses an opportunity to be cute.

The next day Jill calls in sick. Sarah goes to Jill's computer to type some ads Jill was supposed to do. Before she starts, Sarah browses through Jill's files. Jill has set up her own Web site complete with a color photograph and her vital statistics. Sarah skims through Jill's e-mail. Of course all of her pen pals are male, or pretend to be.

After she finishes Jill's work, she has to skip lunch and go develop film. In the dark she spools two rolls and puts them into cans. She turns on the red safe light, pours the developer in, and is walking away from the sink when she trips over some boxes of chemicals that have been moved. She falls hard, hitting her chin against the concrete. She certainly didn't put those boxes in the middle of the floor.

She goes to talk to Mr. Reynolds.

"Well, I've had a lot of bad reports about Jill," he says, "but I think people are just jealous. She's a very attractive girl, you know. It sounds like a personal problem to me. Why don't you two work something out."

Sarah nods, her hands and chin throbbing from breaking her fall.

When she gets home she looks in the bathroom mirror. Her chin has blossomed into a plum.

At breakfast there are no eggs and no milk, so she has corn flakes with orange juice on them. Tomorrow will be pay day. She is still hungry, so she mixes up sugar, cornstarch, and water, cooks it, and eats that. When did she ever have money to spend on cornstarch?

As she washes her damaged face, she remembers she is going to have to talk to Jill. She wants to tell her she is a stupid slut, but that doesn't sound too professional. How else can she put it? She would tell Jill she will get rid of her if she doesn't straighten up, but can she get rid of her? Mr. Reynolds likes Jill.

When she gets to work Sarah opens the back door to the alley. Jill and Mike are standing nearby making out.

"Uh, Jill, could I talk to you?" Sarah asks.

Jill looks at Mike then at Sarah. "Could it wait?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Okay. See you in a few, Mike."

"Morning, boss," Mike says as he slips inside.

"I haven't done anything wrong, have I?" Jill inquires as they stand beside the dumpster. "Mr. Reynolds thinks I'm doing a really good job."

"Yeah, well, there's just a few things. Like the other night you left some boxes out in the darkroom."

"Oh, I didn't leave them out. Mike did. My boyfriend was waiting, and it was time to punch out. I told Mike to put them back. It wasn't my fault."

"Maybe you and Mike shouldn't be in there together."

"But you said I should get familiar with all the facilities. Mike was just showing me where things were. You don't have a problem with that, do you?"

Sarah shakes her head. Finally she says, "You know, your job doesn't really require that you have your own web site."

"But Mr. Reynolds told me that he wants me to know about all the technology. He sees a big future for me here. You could ask him. I know he'd agree. Was there anything else?"

"No. Just be careful around the darkroom. And try to do something productive during the time you're being paid."

"Well, I will, and thank you for talking to me. I certainly want us to get along because I have to work for you."

"Yeah," Sarah says though it hardly seems true.

"I'd better go. Mike'll be waiting."

At lunch Sarah sees Jill and Mr. Reynolds walking out of his office towards the front door.

After work Sarah drives around wondering what to do. She certainly doesn't want to go home and see tonight's sitcom, *Fiesta U*. It makes her sick to watch all those fraternity and sorority kids making out during lectures and drag racing through stoplights in their convertible sports cars. She passes a laundromat and decides to stop. Someone told her about finding three dollars in change at one once.

Inside, she gets down on her hands and knees and begins moving down the rows, sticking her hands under the machines and in the spaces between them. People come and go, but all she sees are their shoes. She is impressed by a nasty pair of black patent leather pumps with pointed toes and a strap back, but when she looks up the girl wearing them could only be twelve or thirteen.

A scrawny, little man comes in wearing dirty pants and carrying a laundry bag over his shoulder. He walks up to the laundry aids machine and begins pulling all the knobs. "Fuck this shit," he says. "I don't need this information."



She smiles at him. Her knees are sore and she is covered with lint. She found two quarters and a dime. She gets up, brushes herself off, sneezes, then leaves. "Fuck this shit. I don't need this information," she tells herself.

Friday morning Mr. Reynolds announces there will be no paychecks. A computer broke down in the main office. Sarah has no food left for the weekend. During the morning she finds Jill and Mike making out in the darkroom, the newsprint storage room, and behind the filing rack for old newspapers.

She goes through her desk and finds some more change, so for lunch she walks to the mini mart. She gets a Coke and a package of Zingers, the most calories for the dollar. One aisle over she sees two heads, one dark and one blond, leaning together. She thinks it is Mike and Jill, and she starts to throw her Zingers at them. She walks around and sees that it is two teenaged boys looking at comic books.

Back in the lunch room, everyone is talking about where they have seen Mike and Jill making out.

"I saw them go into the women's room."

"I saw them in the men's room."

"I saw them getting into the delivery van one afternoon. It must have been a hundred degrees out there."

"The paper boys laugh whenever they see Mike," an old guy says. "They follow him around and say, 'Where's Jill? A boomba, boomba' and hold their hands out like breasts and wiggle."

Even Sarah laughs.

Then Jill and Mr. Reynolds come to the door. Jill smiles at everyone and Mr. Reynolds says, "Glad to see you're having a good time. Maybe you'll do more work this afternoon." Mr. Reynolds leaves.

Jill sits down. "He is so *stupid*," she says, gazing at the ceiling. She could be talking about Mr. Reynolds or Mike or someone she just met. No one knows how to answer her, and soon everyone drifts off.

Sarah is called to the counter to help one of their regular customers, Bill, a lawyer who brings his legal ads to their newspaper because it has cheap rates. He has on yellow slacks, a green and black plaid shirt, and a brown sport coat. Sarah cannot figure out his coordinating principal. He asks her if she wants to go to dinner. He has asked before. This time she says yes. It is the only way she can think of to get a meal. Other women go out with guys because of their money all the time, she tells herself.

After he leaves, she heads for the darkroom. The door is shut, so she knocks and shouts, "Hey, get dressed. I'm coming in." When she finally opens the door, Mike and Jill aren't there. She goes in but turns around when she hears them walking by. They lift their hands to show they aren't touching and smile at her. She wants to throw a bottle of developer at them and melt them down to two sensuous pools of clothing, but there is nothing she can do. Her hands are shaking so much she can't even wind a spool of film and has to give up. She wants to smash Jill. She won't, but maybe someday someone will if Jill isn't careful.

In the main room Sarah takes a place on the line next to Carlos and does inserts.

"Cómo está?" Carlos says.

"Está sick and tired of this shit."

"El trabajo?"

"No, la bruja, la mujer blanca."

"Do you want to come to mi casa for dinner?" Carlos says.

"No, I have a date."

"Ah, bien. You're not looking so good these days anyway."

"Thanks a big fucking lot."

"Ah, mi novia, mi amor." Carlos clutches his heart.

"Hey, get to work down there," someone shouts.

On her way home Sarah sees a small, blond woman on a bicycle just ahead of her. She thinks it is Jill. She looks around in her car for something to throw at her. She wishes she had a cup of Coke, but all she has is a rock. She turns to follow the bicycle. When she goes by, the woman on the bike smiles. It isn't Jill. It takes Sarah ten minutes to get back to her street.

the bottom half of her hair turns yellow-orange. Lonnie comes in. He looks at the barrettes and hair clips in her drawer longingly. He picks up an elaborate gold one and strokes it. He sees her watching him.

"I can't have this," he tells her as if someone has already told him, "because I'm a boy, and boys don't wear these." He throws it in the drawer, slams the drawer shut, and runs back to the living room.

After the boys leave, Sarah is in her bedroom getting dressed when she hears a noise in the living room. She walks in buttoning her shirt with her jeans unzipped.

"Hi," Bill says as if they are best friends.

They go to a pizza place Bill likes because it is cheap. He spent the morning serving eviction papers, he tells her; it is his favorite part of his job. Then he talks about the money he gets for doing different legal chores and how much he saves by shopping at a warehouse supermarket and buying foods in bulk.

When the waitress drops off the tab, Sarah insists on paying so she won't owe Bill a thing. She writes a bad check. Her bank will cover it, but it will cost. Bill is so grateful she thinks she will have to slap his face.

On the drive back to her apartment he asks if he can come in for a cup of coffee.

"We don't even *like* each other," she says.

He reluctantly agrees but still wants to come up.

"I *hate* you," she tells him.

"That bad?" he asks.

She nods.

To make sure she doesn't get forced into anything, when he pulls up to her building she opens the door while the car is still moving and jumps out. She runs inside, locks the door, and turns on all the lights.

The boys are soon knocking. She sits outside on the steps with them enjoying the cool night air.

"When you're in your emotional wheelchair you can go to the emotional wheelchair campground and they'll take care of you for the weekend," Nicholas tells her.

"That's stupid," Lonnie says.

"Well, or else if you're blind, they'll let you bring a seeing eye hamster to the park as long as you keep him on a leash. You can go on nature walks. There's piles of corn for him at the stops, and you can touch the trees and plants and things."

After a while Nicholas wants to get his baseball and play catch, so they walk towards the boys' apartment. Lonnie hangs back. He doesn't want to play catch. Sarah waits for him while Nicholas runs ahead.

"Watch me," Lonnie says. He starts walking on his tiptoes as if he is wearing high heels. His hips sway, and he waves his hands, limp-wristed, in flourishes to each side.

"I *have* to walk like this," he tells her.

She knows, in a way, it is true. He crosses the whole courtyard without letting his heels touch the ground.

Nicholas comes out with his baseball. Lonnie straightens up.

"When I get paid, I'll take you guys to McDonald's," she says, catching Nicholas's toss. She can't really afford it, but she doesn't care.

"Yeah!" Nicholas shouts.

"But I don't *like* McDonald's," Lonnie whines. "Can't we go somewhere I want to go?"

"Shut up, Lonnie. You do too like McDonald's," Nicholas says.

Sarah smiles at them. She is giving up on justice. Things are never going to turn out fair.

Katherine Toy Miller's fiction has appeared in Mademoiselle, Best of the Missouri Review, Another Chicago Magazine, and elsewhere. She is a former Fine Arts Work Center fellow.



Cherry

NORRIS CHURCH MAILER

Easy Rider was incredible. Brother Wilkins was right, in a way, to be scared of it. The heroes were long-haired dope-smoking hippies on a motorcycle road trip across America, and the villains were ignorant rednecks, just like all the ones who drank coffee at the Town Café right here on Main Street.

One of the hippie characters, whose name was George, was played by a really adorable guy named Jack Nicholson, and in the scene when they were sitting around the campfire and he got stoned on grass and started talking about UFOs, it was just the best. I think every kid who saw that wanted to be on the road and free like that. Then later, when they stopped at that little café—which, I kid you not, was a dead ringer for the Town—and all the stupid old hicks were making nasty cracks about their long hair and all, I couldn't hardly stand it. I had seen it too many times in real life. Even G. Dub, who had lived in this town his whole life, got a lot of grief when he started to grow his hair long.

It was a big relief, in the movie, when they left the café—after realizing that they weren't going to get served—without a fight. I thought, They are smart to get out of there. They're going to be all right. Ha. In the very next scene, they were ambushed by those same rednecks from the café, and George was killed.

I just couldn't stand it. I started to cry. It was so real. I could see Tripp lying there, his head bashed in by a baseball bat, just like George.

"Don't cry, Cherry. It's just a movie." He put his arm around me.

"No it's not. It's not a movie. It's real life." He squeezed me close to him. I slunk down in the seat, making myself as small as possible, and snuzzled my shoulder into his armpit. I should have shut my eyes, too, because in the next scene, carried away by their grief, Billy and Wyatt went off to a cathouse in New Orleans, picked up two hookers, and got zonked-out on acid in a graveyard right in the middle of the daytime. The camera did all kinds of weird things—zooming in and out, getting fuzzy, distorting the picture—trying to make it look like a real acid trip, I guess, and the girls took off all their clothes and danced naked in the graveyard. You could even see their black pubic hair. That was enough, right there, to send Brother Wilkins into orbit.

"Is that what trips are really like, Tripp?" I whispered.

"Kind of. As close as you can get it on film. Not bad. Whoever made this movie knew his stuff."

By the time we got out of the theater, I was wrung-out. I couldn't believe that awful redneck with the disgusting wen on his neck just blew Dennis Hopper away like that for no good reason. I hoped the wen was cancer and his jaw would have to be amputated like poor old man Winston Coffey, who got cancer from dipping snuff and went through the last ten years of his life with no jaw, holding a handkerchief in front of his face to catch the spit and eating baby food that his daughter poured down his throat with a funnel. I know that it's a sin to wish bad things on people, and I know, of course, it was just an actor in the movie, not a real man. I mean, obviously, I didn't wish the actor to get cancer and lose his jaw, and maybe it was a fake wen anyhow, but ... oh, I don't know what I wished. It was just all so real. Maybe I was still upset from my conversation with Mama, and the funeral and all.

We headed out to the lake after the movie. I was really glad that Mama hadn't gone with us. I don't think she's ready for something like that. Better to start her out on more Elvis movies, or Doris Day and Rock Hudson.

"Penny?" Tripp asked as we drove down the road that ran by Baby's house. Our windows were rolled down and the radio was playing "Let the Sunshine

In." I loved that song and turned it up really loud, since we weren't near any railroad tracks.

"What do you mean?"

"A penny for your thoughts. You seem to be rolling some wheels in there."

"Sorry. I guess the movie got to me. It's just ... I think that the world is full of an awful lot of hate-filled people. I mean, who were those guys hurting? Why should anybody care how long they wore their hair? It's not fair."

"Nobody ever said it had to be fair."

We had pulled up to the edge of the water, about a mile past Baby's house. It was, in fact, probably right about where they had found Carlene. Tripp killed the motor and flipped off the lights. It was real quiet. You could hear the frogs croaking and the crickets chirping.

"Why did you come out here, Tripp? It's creepy. I think it's where they found Carlene."

"Is it? Are you sure?"

"Pretty sure."

"Do you want to leave?"

What was wrong with me tonight? He was going to think I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown or something. "I don't know."

He scooted the seat back and put his arm around me. I didn't feel any easier.

"I'll tell you a story to get your mind off of the movie. Did you ever hear about the trapper and the hook?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"It's a true story. Once upon a time in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas,

there was a trapper who got his hand bitten clean off at the wrist by a wolf that was caught in one of his traps. He shot the wolf but was so weak from loss of blood that he couldn't get home, and he lay there in a fever, beside the body of the wolf, hallucinating for two days before they came looking and found him. He was in the hospital out of his head for months, but he lived, and they made him a hook to replace the hand he had lost.

"But the experience unhinged him, and he got crazier and crazier. He took to roaming the hills at night, and if he saw a car parked in the woods, he thought it was poachers after his traps and he would sneak up on the parkers and kill the boy and rape the girl.

"One night, a couple went parking up there, and the girl had the jitters. She just felt like something wasn't right. The guy didn't want to leave, but the feeling she had kept getting stronger and stronger, until finally, practically in a panic, she made him gun the car and take off. When they got back to her house, he got out to open the door for her, and there, hanging on the car door handle was ... a hook!"

He grabbed me at that moment and I screamed.

"Tripp Barlow, I'm going to kill you!" He was laughing and dodging my fists, and then he opened the door trying to get away, and we fell out onto the ground. By then, I was laughing too.

"You really are a nut. And of course I've heard that old story before—or a version of it. My great-grandma heard that story."

"Then why did you scream?"

"Because I felt like it. Now, get me up off of this wet ground."

He pulled me up and the two of us leaned against the hood of the car, looking up at the sky and out over the dark lake.

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a cigarette, and flicked his Zippo. The smoke smelled sweet and a little like alfalfa, but different. He wouldn't ... surely it wasn't ... but it couldn't be anything else.

"Would you like to try a toke?" He held out the joint toward me. It was thin, and the tip glowed red in the dark. I began to tremble, but I tried not to let him see. I put my hands between my knees and pressed them together.



"Is that marijuana?"

"That's exactly what it is. Grass. Weed. Pot. Cannabis. A natural plant made by God. A gift from God to human beings. It's as natural as tobacco—grows right in the same ground. And it's probably a lot better for you."

He took another drag, inhaled it, and held it in his lungs for a long moment before he blew it out in a stream. Now I couldn't hide it. I was shaking visibly. My hands were cold. I looked out at the dark shadows on the lake. It had to be right out there where they found Carlene. I was getting a little sick to my stomach. The smell from the smoke seemed to be making me light-headed. Anyway, something was.

"Don't be scared. You know I wouldn't do anything to hurt you. I just want you to feel as good as I do right now. I promise, it is not like drugs. It's just a little wild weed. Straight from the earth."

I put my icy hands into my armpits to try and warm them up. This was crazy. I couldn't believe I was out here in the presence of an actual marijuana joint. I should run as fast as I could to Baby's house. I'd be safe there. But part of me didn't want to—the same part that hated the rednecks and loved the hippies in *Easy Rider*.

"I don't know how to smoke. I never tried it."

"Let me show you." He took a deep drag on the joint, then put his hand behind my head and pulled me into his arms. He leaned in to kiss me, and as my lips touched his, he breathed smoke into my mouth. I held my breath, then pulled away. Some of the smoke got into my mouth. I exhaled as hard as I could, so it wouldn't get in my lungs. He seemed not to notice that I hadn't actually inhaled any smoke.

"See, it's not so bad, is it?" He held out the joint toward me. "Here. You try it. You just put it between your lips and suck in. Breathe it all the way down into your lungs and then hold it for as long as you can."

There was a funny taste in my mouth. I looked up at the sky, half expecting to see a bolt of lightning coming down at my head, but it was clear. The stars hadn't moved. Tripp was still holding the glowing joint out to me. Oh well. In for a penny, in for a pound.

I took the joint from him with trembling fingers and put it to my lips. I sucked the hot smoke into my lungs. For about a second. Then my body rebelled and I started to cough. Deep, racking coughs. I couldn't catch my breath. Tripp tried to pat me on the back, but he was making it worse.

"No, get away from me!" I choked out the words and pushed him away. Leaning against the car bumper, I slowly got my wind back. I breathed several clear drafts of air, and then the strangest thing started to happen. My heart began to pound. I could feel the very blood pump through all its chambers into the veins and arteries, racing to the ends of my body, arms and legs, rounding the corners of my fingers and toes and climbing again to my heart. My whole body was beating like a giant heart. The air was so clear, the stars so bright. My heart beat faster and faster. It was going to run right out of my body. I must be dying.

"Tripp! Take me to the hospital! I think I'm having a heart attack!" He started to laugh. He threw back his head and laughed and laughed.

"No, baby, you aren't having a heart attack."

"I'm not dying?"

"You're getting high. Like nobody I ever saw before." He put his arms around me and held me tight. He must have felt my heart pounding, because he started to rub my back in slow, firm circles. Nothing had ever felt as good as that back rub did. After a minute, I started to calm down. I did trust him. He wouldn't let anything bad happen to me.

Something new was starting. I was relaxing, my heart returning to normal. I was so relaxed that I felt dreamy. It seemed like I could float. My arms floated up and went around Tripp's neck. We kissed. A slow, warm, friendly kiss that tasted like burnt fields and moonlight.

Norris Church Mailer was raised in Arkansas and now lives on Cape Cod with her husband of twenty-five years, Norman Mailer. She's the mother of two sons and the stepmother of five daughters and two sons. "Cherry," is excerpted from her first book, *The Windchill Summer* (Random House, 2000).



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in our little jetson saucers
by now... but i do see the future at
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those morphic shaped Johnathan
adler vases... Visionaire +
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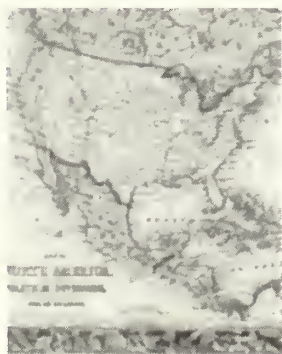
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WILLIAM CORBETT

Michael Mazur: Printer, Painter, Collaborator

The appearance of Michael Mazur's print retrospective, new paintings, and print collaborations at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts is newsworthy because the MFA traditionally pays two levels of attention to Boston artists—scant and none. Showing Mazur as the millennium begins may signal a change in the MFA's attitude. This is to be hoped for, and Mazur, if such a change comes to pass, is a worthy avatar. Over a long career he has produced beautiful work in a range of mediums, and the paintings, all done within the past year, proclaim that at age sixty-four, he is not finished yet. While the Museum's shotgun ménage à trois may confuse those new to Mazur's art, every aspect of the show engages and rewards on its own terms.

Every retrospective has at least one vivid story line. In Mazur's, organized by the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, the artist acquires what Keats called "negative capability," the character to go beyond the resources and comforts of talent into realms of uncertainty and risk. During the mid-1950s, while an undergraduate at Amherst College, Mazur studied with Leonard Baskin, whose gaunt black prints seemed to be everywhere at the time. Mazur's early wood engravings make clear the pupil's ability to learn from the master. Also attracted to the work of Käthe Kollwitz and Max Beckmann, this is a talented young artist who ably expresses his talent through a received vocabulary. The catalogue raisonné (it is a much juicier and user-friendly book than this dry title implies) tells the reader that during his apprentice years Mazur worked hard at his prints. He made his first one in 1956; five years later he made his one hundredth. It soon becomes apparent that Mazur is one of those driven artists for whom thinking is synonymous with doing. This is the perfect temperament for a printmaker whose art is based on process. He cannot step back and regard what he has done in the midst of doing it; he must finish what he starts.

In 1965 Mazur completed his "Images from a Locked Ward" series, fourteen prints in all. Compelling images include the glowering *The Corridor* and the scarred, straining head in *All the Work I Do Is in My Neck*, which keep company with the work of other writers and artists haunted by the madhouse at the time—Allen Ginsberg, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Ken Kesey, and Diane Arbus. Until this point Mazur's prints have been strong on line and shading. Here he creates expressive, empty, white space. From this point on, Mazur has worked in series as often as he could. He thrives on theme and variation which, again, seems perfect for

printmaking, an art where new technical knowledge or inspiration prompts changes after a print is pulled. The series affords freedom.

When Mazur discovered monotype in 1977 he began to exploit this freedom. He did so by accepting what was outside his control. As the name monotype makes clear, there is but one print to be had. Usually. The second and third prints from the same plate are called "ghost impressions." In these Mazur glimpsed what could be gained from allowing the process to have its say. Before going into detail I want to pause over the monotype *Red Roller*, 1977, a beautiful print on its own and, in my view, the place where Mazur started, albeit unwittingly, to assume Keats's negative capability.

The MFA placed *Red Roller* so that viewers saw it first upon entering the room that held Mazur's early work. It may have been the curator's way of saying that you are entering the past through the most significant of Mazur's later paths. *Red Roller* is from the "Palette Still Life" series. There is a green film of ink above a band of sunset red. Below is a field of coal-black ink. The red roller sits with its fat, graspable handles in the foreground, eager to feel the artist's grip, or the viewer's, who imagines what it is to roll the ink over the plate. While not the color of blood, Mazur's red implies the lifeblood of art, the allure and sustaining force of the work itself. As his show unfolded Mazur's ink-slick roller became a key tool in monotypes with fresh and daring images.

We first see these in the flower series, the night cyclamen and calla lilies of 1980. The catalog presents, *en face*, *Calla Lily #1* and #2. The first is cold white lilies on a night ground, flowers of a frosty, haughty elegance. The background of the second is as gray as an overcast sky. Three of the lilies are now faded into memory, but the four at the center have golden stamens and greenish stems. Mazur's work on what could have been a throw-away, in print lingo a "weakened" image, refreshed these lilies as art refreshes for us what we love, but lose, in the living.

In 1983, Mazur, working with the master printer Robert Townsend, with whom he joined forces in 1977 and works to this day, exercised this new freedom by taking the risk of much larger scale. The "Wakeby Day/Wakeby Night" triptychs, first shown at M.I.T., are over six feet long and four feet high. Wakeby Lake on Cape Cod is where the Mazur family then summered. Tall sunflowers bow their golden heads in the foreground. Behind them islands float in the lake, before a distant horizon of low hills and under a summer sky. In *Wakeby Day II* Mazur inset an angled rectangle of



CANTO III, 1993 FROM THE INFERNO OF DANTE
PHOTO: DAVID AND LOUISE WEBBER



MICHAEL MAZUR WITH ROLLER, 1983 PHOTO: GREG HEINS

night—daydreaming of the night to come or remembering last night—that carried over into the triptych's right panel. In *Wakeby Night* a day rectangle occupies the same position. The night sky is a bluish dark, with a summer essence daylight dying into night, or morning blue coming on.

To create these works Mazur began with a monotype ground. (The catalog has an excellent photo diary showing Mazur and Townsend at work on the plates that produced these monotypes. This is complemented by the catalog's clearly written glossary of printmaking terms guaranteeing that the neophyte as well as the experienced viewer, like me, who can't keep the terms straight will know how each print was made.) On top of the ground Mazur used other techniques: lithography, wood relief, and chine collé. This produced works of sweep and close-up detail not usually associated with monotype's inherent quickness. Mazur achieved a way to pause his method so that the viewer might dwell on lake and sky.

Beginning in 1995 Mazur immersed himself in the series of prints that grew out of his trip to China in 1987. This series, which has gone through a dizzying number of permutations, has emerged simultaneously with his Chinese paintings, to my eye the best paintings he has ever done. In going from the prints to the paintings, Mazur has played a duet with himself. The Chinese prints are strings and woodwinds and the paintings, drums and brass. The print mediums of monotype, etching and aquatint, and lithograph, have yielded the scherzo of black lines and tremolos of muted colors. The prints are not as lush as the paintings, but in their depths they are still in a way that the paintings, where bombs of color go off, cannot be.

Two different muses—fraternal not identical twins—are being served.

Another series, Mazur's monotypes for Robert Pinsky's translation of Dante's *Inferno*, have a long history. In 1956 Mazur interrupted his studies at Amherst to spend the year in Italy, in hindsight a decisive year in his formation as an artist. While visiting Florence he bought his first prints and learned Italian so that he could read Dante in the original. The catalog documents that in 1968 he made two prints, both "studies" for Cantos III and VIII of Dante's *Inferno*. His passion for the poet surfaced again in 1992 when he began the collaboration with Pinsky that Farrar, Straus & Giroux published in 1994. Mazur's prints, rich in menacing gloom, cold and ghostly, solid with the moral darkness of the 20th-century Western imagination, and yet ethereal, have been hailed as the Dante for our time. To this I can only add the memory of first seeing the prints tacked on the walls of Mazur's Cambridge studio. He had invited a number of people in to see them and we filled the room. I remember the thrill of rediscovering the poem I had not read in years. To their quality as illustrations, Mazur added *his* reading of the poem, the wordless something aroused in him by Dante's words, now made visible.

Brigham's soda fountain restaurants were once ubiquitous in the Boston area. If you ordered an ice cream cone you could have the ice cream rolled in chocolate sprinkles, "jimmies." The MFA added jimmies to Mazur's prints in the form of seven new paintings Mazur painted in a whirlwind for the show. In them he has freely and joyfully improvised on the landscape/mindscape Chinese themes that have occupied him for the past several

years. These paintings have an abandon, a looseness of attack that is not about giving up control but accepting the rightness that going beyond control can bring—Keats's negative capability again. The major painting is *The Seasons*, four five-foot-long panels beginning, where only the financial year begins, in summer, and surging into the new growth, the future that is spring. Time is the theme but there is nothing wistful about *The Seasons*. This is not time passing or past but time given material force, the river that can be stepped into endless times. The paintings are bold and filled with sky and earth passages of surpassing wild beauty. After the prints, the effect was like exiting out of the mouth of a cannon.

Exiting, but not quite yet. The corridor that led away from the paintings was hung with prints by Yvonne Jacquette, David True, Fred Sandback, Gregory Gillespie, Joan Snyder, George McNeil, and others who collaborated with Mazur and Townsend at the New Provincetown Print Project. Mazur began this project in 1990 as a way to generate income for the Fine Arts Work Center by publishing portfolios of prints by top artists. As I walked down the corridor I may have been the only viewer reminded of "The American Way Room," which Mazur installed in a Central Square, Cambridge, storefront in 1968 during the Vietnam War. (The catalog has a single photograph of the room.) Various images from the war, most well-known now, but not so prominent then, were arranged for the propagandistic purpose of reminding the man and woman in the street that there was a war going on in their name. Of course, the exquisite work of Jacquette, Sandback, and True, to name the three that stood out for me, has nothing to do with the Vietnam War. Mazur is the link, his social conscience, once provoked by war, is now moved by the needs of artists and art. In typical energetic fashion he answered their call. Anyone who saw the Boston show, or experiences it through the catalog, will not be surprised that Mazur continues to exercise his faculties at large in a number of wide and various fields. One day another retrospective will take these all into account.

William Corbett's most recent books are Boston Vermont (Zoland Books, 1999) and John Raimondi Sculptor (Hudson Hills, 1999). He writes about art for Modern Painters and artsMEDIA.

What I Saw at the Whitney

IS THERE TOO MUCH ART OUT THERE?

Or are there just are too many large, unfocused and themeless group exhibitions? These spectacles have become the art industry's equivalent of the convention and trade show—random, noisy, and populist in spirit, but more for the art industry than the culture at large. A critic of the Venice Biennale last season accused these proliferating shows of promoting “festival art,” i.e. extravaganza-type displays or stunts of an art-crowd-shocking/pleasing nature. Most insidious, though, is that curatorial competition for the new and undiscovered reduces art and artists to hot products du jour, overexposed for a few exhibition cycles, then dropped from the rosters and virtually unheard of again. But while critics everywhere seem to lament the haphazardness of these large shows, critics everywhere also keep showing up and helping publicize them. And so, here, with my mea culpa, is my take on the 2000 Whitney Biennial.

While the century-old Venice Biennale is the grande dame of the international surveys, the seventy-year-old Whitney is the forerunner of American shows. Up until very recently, one had to be a born or naturalized American citizen to be considered. Now the museum has acknowledged the art world's recent migratory nature; artists must only be “based” in the U.S. to be eligible, according

to the show's press release. (The term “based,” by the way, is one of those interesting semantic attempts to obfuscate the art world's old nemesis of regionalism.)

This year's show, with its six guest curators “based” in different regions of the country, featured ninety-seven artists. About half were represented by Internet sites, films, and video works, presented at scheduled viewing times. Fairly or not, I focused on physically present works available during the time I was able to spend at the show. Time-based works are, by default, simply less able to contend in a gallery setting, and perhaps should be reviewed by film or specialized new media critics.

Among gallery-installed works, the show had a brokered feel to it, an “I'll give in on X, but only if we take Y” curatorial scenario, or perhaps reflected a consensual process where the middle ground, and nobody's first choice, most often won out. There was also a high degree of geographical correctness, favoring artists based elsewhere than New York, and heavily weighted toward Texas. Did any of the six curators (from California, Texas, Illinois, Connecticut, and New York/Massachusetts) really go check out the art scene in say,

Missouri, or Iowa, or North Dakota, one wonders? Abstract painting was weakly represented, and nowhere near supported the Whitney's claim of showcasing the best, or most recent developments in art. Along with some who seemed to have made the cut mainly through their various zip codes, there were a handful of those aforementioned, predictable, artists du jour, like John Currin, the painter of cartoonish and needling figurative canvases, and Shirin Neshat, whose ubiquitous video installations of Islamic gender issues are looking a little forced. There were, as well, a few of these artists' predecessors—artists who were once hot, but have since been dropped from the scene, like Louise Lawler. Her appropriation works—photographs of an Andy Warhol wallpaper project shown recently at the Whitney—might have seemed clever in the high concept/theoretical, art-about-art, end-game era of the mid-1980s, but it's hardly the latest thing, as this exhibition purports to contain. And one more trivial quibble—why is it that nearly every recent edition of the show (at least five I can think of) has had a full-scale car sculpture? This year it was the girls' turn, with Kim Dingle's silly, gussied, pink sports car. Back in the 1970s, or even in the all-agitprop show the Whitney put on a few seasons ago, this feminist strategy might have worked. Here and now, it just invites unflattering comparisons with recent, more clever vehicular expressions, like Nari Ward's jazzy hearse, or Charles Ray's blown-up-to-life-size toy fire truck he parked in front of the Whitney a couple of biennials ago.

Others have said it and I agree. This biennial would have been much more interesting if curators had had the courage to choose and separately install their own shows, and if art, rather than geography, had been the main criteria. That said, a few works did make the show worthwhile—Petah Coyne's large wall relief, and video installations by Paul Pfeiffer and Inigo Mangano-Ovalle.

Coyne's quietly massive, free-standing wall relief, *Juliana and Gertrude*, is, from the approach side, a large, thick, and seamless plaster block of polished, milky, marble-like opaqueness—save for two sharply fluted cone-like forms that started high on either end. These pleated flows are of the same hard nacreous-looking material as the wall, and despite their crisp precision, suggest marble drapery or veils, as if the fabric is caught up near the top of the wall, threaded through an aperture and then allowed to fan out to the floor. Coyne's faux sculptural wall was positioned near enough to the real gallery wall to form a dim, narrow corridor on the backside of the piece. Here was revealed the source of the flowing veils, as well as the work's structural artifice. Embedded within the plaster and exposed armature are two nearly life-size found-object religious statues of the Virgin Mary.

This work may seem a departure from Coyne's best-known works, the extravagantly decadent, Miss Haversham-inspired, hanging, white, dripped-wax works, or the glitteringly sinister black tuber-like structures of coarse wire mesh and abrasive industrial grit, which also hang from the ceiling. But Coyne's works preceding this new relief are smaller religious statues caught up in tangles of black hair, and some of Coyne's earliest works contain overt references to the Catholic Church. One very early public art piece was a billboard-sized cutout of a nun, placed on a lethal curve of a busy expressway, and unexpectedly championed by residents of a nearby convent. In Coyne's mind the work was a humorous critique, but the Catholic establishment saw it as homage and awarded her an artist's residency at a seminary in Rome. The same interplay of ambiguous components—homage/critique; obsessive, even overblown, beauty; gorgeous, ominous physicality, and her always knowing, up front theatricality—is also present in *Juliana and Gertrude*. The spirit of this piece is muffled and entombed, disguised by artifice beneath a highly polished surface.

Paul Pfeiffer is a discovery of both the Whitney and the curators who put together the concurrent “Greater New York” show at the P.S. 1 exhibition space, across the East River. (An aside here about this surprise first-time appearance of another large survey show, automatically taken as the Whitney's rival: It too was chosen by a team of curators, from the staffs of P.S. 1 and the Museum of Modern Art, which has recently enveloped within its management this outpost contemporary art space housed in a nostalgically decrepit city school house. A hundred and forty or so mostly little-known artists from the five boroughs of New York were featured, with rollicking results that made the Whitney show look even more humdrum. To the further detriment of the Whitney's efforts, there were only six overlaps between the shows, but, luckily, Pfeiffer was one of them. The Whitney also chose him winner of a newly established cash prize for best artist in the Biennial.)

Pfeiffer's small, one-viewer-at-a-time video projections are the result of prodigious editing of broadcast clips, thus isolating one action, as in *Fragment of a Crucifixion (After Francis Bacon)*. In it a basketball player prances in an endless rage, his



INIGO MANGANO-OVALLE,
LE RAISER THE KISS (DETAIL), 1999
PHOTO COURTESY MAX PROTETCH GALLERY



PAUL PFEIFFER, JOHN 3:16, 2000
DIGITAL VIDEO STILL, PHOTO COURTESY P.S. 1

face contorted in a Bacon-esque primal howl, while behind him, flash bulbs pop in the stands of a crowded arena. There is no audio, and any identifying details, like team logos or advertising, have been edited out. The result is mesmerizing, revealing much about the medium, about context, and about truth, in and out of context. Pfeiffer is one of few in the growing legions of video artists who have cracked video's genetic code and employed its integral aspects, making art that could only be made by video.

At P.S. 1, an equally astonishing Pfeiffer piece isolates multiple spinning basketballs in play, superimposing one upon another within the same, nearly frame-filling range, with backgrounds flickering behind the image at subliminal speeds. The title here—*John 3:16*—also has religious connotations, a metaphor, one presumes, for our latter day religion of sports. But one doesn't have to know the allusion to "For God so loved the world ...," to see the nervously spinning ball as a whirling planet in a chaotic, unreadable universe.

The last piece I would have hated to miss is *Le Baiser/The Kiss* by Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, but it's power is hard to put your finger on. It too is a projected video piece, but visible from both sides of a large screen that bisects the rectangular gallery. On the screen is an immediately engaging, lush, wide-angled view of a life-size scene, showing a plate glass window wall of a modern-style building. A window washer squeegees away at these windows. An audio soundtrack carries the familiar squeaking and sucking sounds made by the tools of the trade. Inside the building, a woman stands, wearing a headset and absorbed in something technical. A real headset hangs on the gallery wall, and through it, one could presumably hear the same thing she was hearing, an electric guitar playing rock. That's all there is, except for a thin metal railing suspended around the room's perimeter, forming both a sculptural presence and a functional barrier.

These minimalist components are of a scale precisely tuned, and the piece emits a benign kind of suspense, where not much happens but the possibility is there. The wall text reveals that the window washer is actually the artist; that the house is the famous 1950-era, all-glass Farnsworth house by Mies van der Rohe (the only residence the architect designed in the U.S.); that the railing around the screen is in the same dimensions as the house's footprint, and that the music on the headset is a remix of a solo originally recorded by the rock band Kiss.

All this is conceptually enriching, but extraneous to the satisfying physical experience of the piece. Because on its own, it, like the work of the other two artists described above, met art's ultimate criteria, which should be the single criteria for art in this and any exhibition—that there be present a mysterious intelligence, multiple and universal truths, and infinite complexities, regardless of other qualifying factors.

Ann Wilson Lloyd is an independent critic who writes for the New York Times, Art in America and other publications. She first wrote for Provincetown Arts in 1989, and credits Provincetown and its arts community with instigating her art writing career.

PETAH COYNE, *UNTITLED #978 (DETAIL)*, 1999-2000 PHOTO WIT MCKAY

THE AERIAL PERSPECTIVE OF TONY VEVERS

Tony VEVERS' retrospective this summer at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum shows how he developed from a young artist painting on canvas to a mature artist who found a way to translate the idiom of paint into the literal medium of earth materials. "If any aspect of my work has evolved," VEVERS told me a few years ago, "it is not applying paint to two-dimensional surfaces, but in making constructions and assemblages. I used to be a carpenter. I like using tools. I can produce three-dimensional work that is very satisfying, perhaps because it is more real to me."

VEVERS was born in London and spent much of his childhood in the English countryside at Whipsnade, where his father, the director of the London Zoo, kept open fields of buffalo and zebras. When Hitler rose to power and began to bomb England in the Blitz, VEVERS and his sister came to stay with friends in the U.S. for the duration of the war. He attended a private boarding school, Hotchkiss, on a scholarship. Shortly after settling down in his new environment, he went to the art room and checked out paint, paper, and brushes. He got up early before school and went out to paint a lake with mountains in the background. Finally his brush broke, but only after the weather changed and it became too cold to paint outdoors. He knew one thing: in this life he would become a painter.

After graduation he was drafted into the Army, serving in the occupation forces at the end of the war. He made pencil sketches of the devastation he saw in Europe. "Bonn," he wrote in a memoir, "was a ruined city, bombed and blasted to rubble." A later painting, *Displaced Person*, is testimony to the hallucination of horror that is the odyssey of stateless people, for whom returning home to nothing was the equal of an aimless exile.

While serving in the Army of Occupation, he got furloughs to visit his father and stepmother in England. After the war he attended Yale University on the G.I. Bill, taking studio courses at the Yale School of Art. He drew from a traveling circuit of models who made their way up the East Coast from New York to Boston. A model would hold the same pose for a week. In many of the drawings the figure sits or rests a leg on a stool, and the light comes so sharply from one side that the figure often seems divided. These life drawings show a rapt interest in bone and muscle, hands and feet. They help us see how VEVERS, in his late constructions, reflects on the relation between the figure and its frame.

Following graduation in 1950, he reunited with his family, spending academic winters in Italy and two holiday summers in England. One painting of this period, *Lungarno*, is an elegy to Florence. The river Arno, dividing the city, is at the bottom of the canvas, a thick black pulse of poetry where the rhythm is scanned in five sharp strokes, bent smoothly as they twist. The meandering river is a base from which half the city rises in a series of rolling hills. The bulging forms breathe like lungs; they are VEVERS' summation of a year and a half of looking, a total image of the landscape around the city. Fields, vineyards, and orchards of olive and almond trees become essentialized into mellow shapes that cluster and jostle together, shameless and joyous. Colors are cloud-like, light-filled, soft and muted. Trees bristle like stiff hair on the distant rim of one of the higher mountains. VEVERS builds his vista with forgiving borders, blurred and misty, yet integrated, as if his elements were connected by what separated them. In this profoundly satisfying painting, VEVERS seems compelled by the concept of a comprehensive point of view rather than a single focal point on a horizon. VEVERS was trying to understand Cézanne in a Florentine setting, putting in as many viewpoints as possible, while acknowledging the soft painterly quality of Giorgione's *La Tempesta*, also a major influence.

Returning to New York, VEVERS studied with Hans Hofmann for six months. He wrestled with the dirty colors of the city. He had no palette for asphalt and soot. Influenced by Franz Kline, he soon began painting in black and white, with fierce and jagged clashes at the edges. He did about twenty paintings in black and white; thinking they were not successful, he destroyed them, a decision he now regrets. At the Cedar Bar and the Club, which VEVERS frequented, the ideological arguments centered on Abstract Expressionism. He went to the opening of de Kooning's "Women" series, where the bared teeth of a female demon flashed through agitated washes of color. VEVERS was amazed to see how de Kooning was criticized for the base act of incorporating a figurative reference into an abstract painting.

He spent the summer of '53 in Maine, painting watercolors on tiny Monhegan Island with a friend, the painter Steve Pace, whom he had met in Florence. He was reminded of the natural colors of Italy. During the summer he met Elspeth Halvorsen, whom he married in the fall. They set up house on Delancey Street on the Lower East Side; living romantically in a cold-water loft, they somehow managed to heat the water. Halvorsen had taken art history courses with Meyer Shapiro at the New School and painted at the Art Students League with Julian Levy. VEVERS began exhibiting at the City Center Gallery and Gallery East.

In 1955 he began showing in group shows at the Tanager Gallery, an artists' cooperative, and a model for Long Point Gallery, the cooperative he would co-found in Provincetown. At the time, he had a job working at City Center on West 54th Street. He took the elevated train uptown, then walked through Central Park to get to work. Daily, he felt a need to be in nature. One painting of this period, *Landscape II*, shows the park in winter, with black rocks jutting out of the snow. The vegetation is forlorn, yet does not look dead. This is when VEVERS started thinking about leaving New York and moving to the country.

On Easter Day, 1955, he and Halvorsen walked across the Williamsburg Bridge. He came back elated. Spontaneously he painted his first figurative painting, *Easter Nude*. The heavy impasto of the paint seems pressed into thick flower petals that yield into a languid shape. Unlike de Kooning, VEVERS was not trying to be audacious; he refrained from showing the paintings. Whereas de Kooning is abstract, VEVERS is realistic. The nude was simply the image VEVERS was trying to make.

He and Halvorsen moved to Provincetown, needing nature, knowing geography forms people. Besides, they felt they might be better off being poor in Provincetown than poor in New York. Tony supported the family by doing carpentry during the summer. He did most of his painting in the winter, a season that recurs often in paintings of this period.

When his friend Jan Müller died in January 1958, VEVERS made six or eight studies for the elegiac painting, *Funerale in the Snow*, which was eventually purchased by Joseph Hirshhorn. VEVERS had seen young people die in the Army, but he didn't expect artists to die young. Müller had come to the U.S. to study with Hofmann, with whom he could speak in their native German. He had a heart ailment and was fitted with a plastic valve that audibly thumped in his chest; the valve gave out as the doctors had warned it would if he continued to paint.

Funerale in the Snow exemplifies VEVERS' classic idiom: large, elongated figures, with obscured, Rothkoesque edges. Faces are without features. There are a dozen mourners with their heads bowed, shrouded in black while standing in pristine white snow. VEVERS was present at the Truro cemetery, but he does not depict himself. Instead, he takes the same point of view as the viewer. The tall, bearded figure on the right is recognizably Paul Resika. At the time VEVERS did not know Resika, but years later Resika mentioned that he had been at the funeral. Next to the minister on the far right is the artist's widow, Dody Müller, bending to place a flower on the grave. Al Leslie was also at the ceremony, VEVERS remembers. At the conclusion,

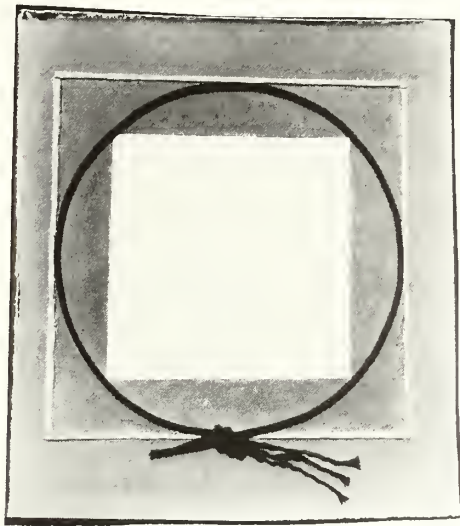
just as the minister finished reading his lines, sun broke through the clouds. That was the "magic moment" that Vevers tried to capture on canvas. Later they all went to Myron Stout's place on Brewster Street for drinks and consolation.

That summer Vevers had his first one-man show at the Sun Gallery in Provincetown. He showed large paintings of simple figures eternally laboring, like a lone clam digger at low tide, diminutive on acres of sand flats. Two years later Milton Avery chose one of Vevers' works, *Ah, Winter*, for a show at the National Arts Club in New York, curated by older artists choosing younger artists. Vevers continued to explore how an abstract painting could express concrete feeling. He admired the casual brushy-ness of Avery, with large expanses of dry color and rolling contours that give off an aura along their edges.

In the early '60s Vevers accepted a position teaching art at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His painting, *Transition*, with its multiple scenarios, is an autobiographical narrative. Yet the formal idea came from a trip to the National Gallery in Washington. There he was very taken by a Byzantine painting encircled with smaller scenes that were related to the central image, a cycle of complementary narratives that enrich the primary narrative. Thus he began to make paintings with multiple images, rather than single images. He once remarked to me, "Whenever you make a transition, you must reduce the issue to a few elements. To see what you are doing, there is a need to simplify." During transitions, he believes it is natural for artists to become minimal in order to balance the old and the new.

Vevers had begun to spend a portion of the winter in Mexico, he and Halvorsen staying with her mother and stepfather, the sculptor Dudley Pratt. The couple would return to San Miguel de Allende for twenty years. Here he discovered earth as a medium, using it with increasing sophistication as he began to understand the gripping power of acrylic medium mixed with fine dark river sand inflected with flint-like specks of silica. When Vevers accepted a second teaching position at Purdue University, he began making sand paintings that referenced the Indiana farmlands, and especially the Wabash River, which flooded every spring. Vevers became fascinated with aerial photographs of the floods, published in the local paper. He began to consider how aerial views eliminate depth perception while views on land incorporate intervening objects to provide clues to depth. One work about the Wabash, which Vevers did in 1973, makes use of colored strips of cloth torn from abandoned canvasses. Working on a wide table, he found a way to layer the present with rifts of the past.

Nat Halper closed the HCE Gallery in the early '70s and used the space simply as a storeroom. Wanting to show his current work, but without a gallery, Vevers rented it for two weeks in the summer of '73, paying Halper \$100, using his gallery furniture, his desk, and his lights. In 1975 he did the same thing at the Tennis Club, renting the airy second floor room that became the Group Gallery and, currently, DNA Gallery. Some of the artists who were to form Long Point Gallery



LEONARDO, 1992

attended. Vevers sponsored these shows himself. The artist Judith Rothschild and the collectors Bill Brill and Hilary Masters bought paintings. Vevers succeeded in paying the rent and the advertising. Other artists became attracted by the idea that an artist could take control of his own exhibitions. Of course, no one has gotten rich or famous from a cooperative gallery—"There's no Castelli pushing you!" Vevers told me in 1990 when I interviewed him for the *Provincetown Arts* cover story on Long Point. He was sixty-four. But he believed for an artist like himself, who is not in the New York mainstream, that Long Point was a "great alternative." He felt like he was just beginning and he said, "Hopefully, you always feel that way."

The '70s were a period of consolidation and clarification for Vevers. His production slowed, but his resolve intensified. Vevers hardly knew some of the artists who would join him in forming Long Point Gallery at the end of the decade, but others, Bultman, Manso, and Motherwell, all of whom made collages, Vevers knew well. Aerial landscapes made with earth material dominated this decade; he represented natural boundaries—rivers and trees, hills and valleys, divided plots of land. He kept asking himself, especially when he flew seasonally back to the Cape, looking out the window of the plane, "How does a human, with the armspan of two yards, embrace the vast landscape?"

Vevers had meditated on da Vinci's drawing of the human figure in a circle and a square, as a way of analyzing the body. Vevers had always been interested in the connection between geometry and corporal proportion. The frame does not necessarily surround the body, but may have an expressive function in its measurement of the body. Long Point Gallery put on a theme show, asking its artists to produce work in square formats. At the time, tanks took over Tiananmen Square in China; in protest of the closing in upon the individual, Vevers imprisoned a small figure helplessly within a series of squares that decrease in size even as they echo the four edges of the frame. About the entrapping power of this shape, in which no side is dominant, Sidney Simon, Vevers' colleague at Long Point, said, "The four

sides tend to be stronger than anything you can put inside."

In the context of the square, Vevers saw the power of the circle. The boldness of the square came from the fact that it was the only quadrilateral in which a circle can be drawn that touches all four sides. The intimate romantic dialogue between the circle and the square began to remind Vevers of his marriage. He pointed out that if his work is earth-bound, Halvorsen's is celestial. He looks down at the ground; she looks up at the sky.

Some of the late works in this retrospective are drawn from the "Tide" series. Using sand, strips of canvas, strands of rope, Vevers created a pair of witty and profound abstract portraits. *Perigee* is titled after the nearest point of orbit between a satellite and a planet. *Apogee* refers to the farthest point of orbit between a satellite and a planet. *Perigee* possesses an unraveling rope that winds through a hole in the frame at the bottom, where it is allowed to sway freely. The rope in *Apogee* burrows beneath the ground, rupturing the surface.

Between the extremes of the low and high watermarks, the tide records its ebb and flow with wavy lines of seaweed, punctuated with flotsam. Vevers loves to wander in the horizontal strip of fresh-washed sand, between sea and shore, that recurs every six hours. Likewise the line in his work may be characterized by its easy lope. It meanders and moves like a finger of water feeling its way. It remains responsive to actual topography, as if the painter's eye had traveled over the very terrain it traces. Thus beachcombing, for Vevers, is less a meditation than an action integral to the making of art. He is drawn to pick up leather soles, discarded years ago by an elderly Portuguese cobbler who had a shop on the east side of the wharf and disposed of what he didn't want on the beach. He is drawn also to pick up Styrofoam fishing buoys pockmarked like skull-shaped asteroids, as well as stray strands of nautical rope. These manmade pieces are inflected with colors that have become at one with their environment—straw-gold, sky blue, teeth white, blood red, and subtle shades of sea-green. The human debris that attracts Vevers seems to have been created by nature.

Another pair from this series, *Tides I* and *Tides II*, is an arrangement of ropes, each spanning the width of the canvas. They divide the ground horizontally, like old lines of linotype, or like a well-designed marine chart showing in a glance the small variations in a week of high tides. These billboard-sized works have a magisterial, public presence. They look as timeworn as parchment scrolls, written with an ancient, inscrutable alphabet that proclaims a communal truth. I am reminded of the esthetic of Long Point Gallery, where thirteen artists shared a common space. Periodically, to pay the rent, they produced a silkscreen print, a collaborative project with each artist having some, relatively equal, area of the format where their own image could breathe.

Christopher Busa writes on the artist Carmen Cicero elsewhere in this issue.



THAT EXISTENTIAL STARE, 1990



TRACER OF LOST PERSONS, 1997

CHRISTOPHER BUSA

Carmen Cicero: "That Existential Stare"

Carmen Cicero is a veteran painter who distinguished himself as an Abstract Expressionist in the early '50s, then went on to be one of the leaders of Figurative Expressionism in the late '50s. Cicero's stormy career, surveyed this summer in a retrospective at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, tells us why an artist can only stay free of the past by forging ahead.

Before a devastating studio fire in 1971 destroyed a decade of his first mature work, Cicero had received two Guggenheim Fellowships in painting. The Ford Foundation Purchase Prize had acquired two works. The Guggenheim, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney also acquired his work. (He is currently represented in twenty-five museum collections.) He had had five one-man shows at the Peridot Gallery. He had been in six Whitney Annuals, almost sequentially. He had studied with Robert Motherwell as a graduate student at Hunter and then taught at Sarah Lawrence. A talented jazz musician, he played the saxophone well enough to play with the best, and did.

Three paintings survive the fire of 1971, including a self-portrait that echoes what he calls "those primordial human instincts," naming them exactly as "sex, race, and violence." The mix of

these themes led Cicero to a conscious vision expressed in one haunted painting titled *That Existential Stare*. Childlike in its graphic directness, it depicts the hour of the wolf, twilight, where color vision gives way to the silver grays of night vision. What is scary is that, though no people are present, the mask of the animal may be the face of the artist. Shortly after Cicero's disaster, Norman Mailer wrote a famous essay, "Superman Comes to Supermarket," unwittingly illuminating Cicero's pilgrimage from soft humor to hard cartoon. Since then, with hindsight, we know that journalism is to fiction what the cartoon is to art. Cicero, in making a cartoon out of a nightmare, turned the cartoon into art.

Cicero was forty-five years old when he returned home, on a winter evening, to the carriage house he was renting in an elegant New Jersey neighborhood. His living quarters were upstairs and his studio was below. Coming up the street, he heard some commotion. He saw police cars with strobe lights flashing. He wondered about a robbery. Then he saw fire engines. Whose house was on fire? Why, it was *his* house. The timbers were charred and smoldering, the metal beams were melted and twisted. Gone were his musical instruments, his hi-fi, and his hundreds of records. Gone, too, were forty expressionist paintings that he had worked on for years. Gone were the

thumbed pages of his 300 art books. Gone, tragically, was the fifteen-by-eight inch drawing in five crayon colors that Miró had inscribed to him, affectionately, following their joint inclusion in the "Inaugural Show" of the Guggenheim Museum. Cézanne, Picasso, and Miró were in the show; Miró told James Johnson Sweeney that he thought Cicero was one of the best artists he'd seen in America.

When he moved into a loft on the Bowery in New York's Lower East Side, Cicero kept telling himself that his pain was an opportunity for complete change. The fire was a mythological event that he tried to minimize in his mind. In a robotic, syllable-at-a-time voice, he told himself that he would buckle down and recover that which he had lost. He rarely talks about the extreme irritation he felt as he became known as one of the followers of Figurative Expressionism, rather than one of its avant garde. Cicero could not prove his provenance. He had no evidence. So he set to work.

Figurative Expression was underway with the support of passionate dealers: Brooke Alexander, Ivan Karp, David McKee, Marisa Del Rey. Then Berta Walker came on the scene as the director of the Graham Gallery, and her enthusiasm convinced him to join the gallery. (Cicero's painting, *Portuguese Princess*, shows a hardy bather with a blush on her face; asked if the princess were Berta Walker, Cicero said, "She could be.")

When Cicero's father died of cancer, he made a painting of a man dying of cancer. Here he saw that what we call neo-expression is when pop culture becomes part of the expression. This made Pop real. Cicero's motifs—the moon, the car, the female, the crazed and menaced stranger—become apocalyptic moments telescoped through the perspective of a single person. Whole cities, the distant buildings as diminutive as toys, are the backdrop for the personal angst of Cicero's cast of characters—a grinning skeleton hailing a taxi at sunrise, a German art critic wearing a blue mask instead of a face, a man running scared down an empty city sidewalk, the white moon in relentless pursuit.

The motif most people ask Cicero about is the moon, looming eternally in so many of his paintings. He concedes there is a possible connection between his crescent moons, shaped like the letter C, and his initials. The waning moon becomes his signature (the new moon faces in the opposite direction). The painter Mary Hackett told the poet Michael Burkard that the way to tell the new moon from the old moon was to remember that the old moon forms the letter C, as in "see you later." A less parabolic explanation might be that the moon sets up a tension, acting as a pivotal point of high compositional significance—where it is placed, how it is placed. As Yeats said, things seen by the light of the moon can be brighter than the prosaic light of day. Cicero told me, "The crescent moon is poetry, visual poetry."

Cicero thinks of the creative process as one of searching and destroying. He destroys what he finds. He paints abstract forms until a figurative element emerges that reveals information from his unconscious. He remembers his teacher Robert Motherwell telling him that his line was suave, fluid, and elegant. It was neither a compliment nor the opposite, but it convinced Cicero that he did not want to be described as suave and elegant. He knew that when one became smooth and "played pretty for the people," as one musician put it, the art would not be heartfelt.

Cicero realized that the figure in his paintings—often fleeing, warning, and shouting—was himself. In his visionary recent works, we see the re-occurring man wearing a fedora and driving a nondescript car from the past, or walking on a segment of road that will only be replaced with another segment, or watching the flight of a single-engine plane with an open cockpit that is empty of a guiding pilot. The painted character, reinventing Cicero's autobiography, goes from frame to frame in the form of a cartoon, a metaphor for the self in transit. If most of the images are at night, they are only enhanced by what limited source of light is shining. The headlights of the antique car, like the limitations of consciousness, probe a dirt path in the woods, vigilant with "that existential stare," even as the narrow way is surrounded by darkness.

Christopher Busa reviews the photographs of Al Wasserman elsewhere in this issue.

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The Cape as Installation



KATHE IZZO, *ME (MYSELF) SHAPED HOLE*, 1999
THE C-SCAPE DUNE SHACK

JOHN SLYCE

Hanging on my grandmother's wall in her sitting room is a wooden plaque with the chiseled inscription: "The Cape, The Cod, The Constant Sea." It was acquired, sometime in the early 1960s, as a tourist trinket—a reminder of place, a passing moment, and an experience. That plaque has been installed in her various houses for as long as I can remember. It has traveled from its origins on the Cape, to Ohio, then Maine, back to Ohio, then Florida, and finally back to Maine. It's getting ready to move again, its next stop still to be determined. Clustered around this plaque is an assortment of metaphors: a painting of a sea

captain made by a very young Tom Till; small wooden fishing boats—great fleets of which depart in the end-of-season bags and trunks of the tourists; a jar filled with some sand; and a collage of broken plates and ceramic shards my grandmother made from the 19th-century treasures that once washed up onto Provincetown's beaches. The scene is an installation that takes on meaning through the experience of the viewer and visitor alike. Perhaps what most makes the wall assemblage seem an installation is that, rather than merely occupying a designated space, it actually constitutes that place. Wherever my grandmother and her plaque are

installed—even in the remove of northwestern Maine—the Cape is there, with its cod and constant sea.

We are all installation artists. Our homes, our gardens, our closets, shelves, and drawers—each is a site colonized by the made-ready materials of the consumerist world that surrounds and the artifacts we assemble in a life of both knowing and unknowing collecting. Installation and video are the dominant presentational forms in contemporary art—the sprawling video installation, released from the frame of a monitor, is in fact so well enshrined as to be conventional. Yet



BERTA MUNSON,
THE GARDEN
(DETAIL), 1995
BERTA WALKER GALLERY



JENNY HUMPHREYS, *BIRDFEEDER*, 1999
LAWN OF THE PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION



JAY CRITCHLEY,
JUST VISITING FOR
THE WEEKEND, 1981
MACMILLAN
PARKING LOT



SAL RANDOLPH, *FREE SHOW (BEFORE)*
& *FREE SHOW (AFTER)* (DETAILS), 1999
THE SCHOOLHOUSE CENTER

for many, installation is a remote form and a confusing vessel that too often generates the rueful query: "But is it art?" This question is generally directed at the materials employed in a work. Art these days doesn't offer a fixed point of view to a viewer, thus the ingredients for material definitions are missing. What is there is the possibility of an experience—the meaning of which is made in the encounter. If you have to ask the question, "Is it art?" then you haven't so much missed something, as forgotten, or failed to contribute your bit to the work.

For me, the most all-embracing installation on the lower Cape is its remarkable natural light. This site-specific phenomenon generates a complex of its own spread across work, play, and place—all shot through with time. Installation once referred solely to how an exhibition was hung, and thus shares a relation to how painting once occupied space in a gallery. At the same time the term borrows from the concepts and practices of assemblage, the creation of environments, and staging of happenings. Distant theatrical origins still resonate in many installations. In a confluence of theater and spectacle, the installation breaks

open the normal container for art—the gallery—and lets the social world in. Art then enters the space of life in return. For those installations that take place in an art space, the gallery becomes a place to experience experience. In looking around you this season, don't so much look at the content, try to appreciate the context—more often than not, therein lies the art. This is true of the Cape's sunsets and also its installations.

John Slyce is a writer and critic based in London, England. As a boy, he lived for awhile in Provincetown and now visits Truro when he is able with his partner, Tamsin, and their daughter, Lara.



M.P. LANDIS, *STUDIO: SQ FT* (DETAIL), 1999
DNA GALLERY





KÜRBISGERECHTIGKEIT (GOURDJUSTICE), 2000

FRED BERNSTEIN

Wry and Pumpernickel: The Antic Photo Shop of Kahn/Selesnick

HAVING ASKED THIS WRITER TO POSE

for a photo that would become part of their spring 2000 show at New York's David Beitzel Gallery, Nick Kahn and Richard Selesnick had opposite reactions to my diaper-wearing, crystal-contemplating figure: while one turned his back to me, the other bowed way down, as if in supplication.

Could the photo symbolize the artists' ambivalence toward the press? That would be far too literal a reading. In the world of Kahn/Selesnick, I'm not a writer, and they're not artists; we're all three bogdwellers on a spiritual journey occasioned by a fictional Armageddon. Partners-in-art since they were college classmates, Kahn (obsequious) and Selesnick (indifferent) have created an ersatz universe that manages to be as spiritual as it is slapstick. Before this year, their work focused on the exploits of the Royal Excavation Corps, a nonexistent yet somehow hardy band of early 20th-century explorers. The Corps' adventures were documented in series of sepia-toned panoramic photos bearing longhand captions. The photos are both fake history—made some sixty years after the events in question—and fake panoramas, since the artists created the 360-degree views a sliver at a time, turning the camera on its tripod between shots. In this way, they conjured a cast of dozens using only themselves and an occasional friend as models. So convincing was this work, completed between 1997 and 1999, that the first time I saw it, at Provincetown's East End Gallery, I thought it was a trove discovered at the Wellfleet Flea Market, rather than conceived in the artists' flea market minds.

The Beitzel Gallery show—parts of which debuted at Pepper Gallery in Boston—is titled "Transmissions from the Shottensumofkünftig" (the last word loosely translated by the artists as "Scotlandfuturebog"), and is set not in the past but in an imagined, post-apocalyptic future. The

denizens of this world wear conical—and comical—facemasks; they march around in gloomy silence, carrying (for reasons even they don't understand) blocks of lard. The work is lush, printed in rich gray tones and on a kind of cascading silk paper (rather than the self-effacing copier paper on which the earlier series were printed). It's as if Kahn/Selesnick, having lured us into their magical netherworld—where, it turns out, we like being—need less and less subterfuge to keep us there.

Gone are the lines and folds and fountain-pen inscriptions, the photographic equivalents of banging a chain against a credenza to create a fake antique. Gone, too, are the accoutrements of travel. Now the characters' full or partial nudity (they're not exactly dressed for trekking) and low-to-the-ground poses suggest a kind of rootedness; so do the often symmetrical arrangements of people, props, and backgrounds. There is no sense of forward movement, as there was in the film-strip-like panoramas. Instead, the characters can only wonder if they have any future, as the introduction to the exhibition, written by the artists, makes clear: "Each rock they move, each lard block they carry, simultaneously causes and averts the coming catastrophe that is now past."

That is a reasonably good description of a Kahn/Selesnick photo shoot. To play a lard carrier, you have to become one. That's what I learned one August afternoon at Provincetown's Hatch's Harbor. Laden with costume components and heavy camera equipment, we had trudged out to the harbor in time for the low tide (when, photographed from just the right angle, sand dunes would loom like mountains). But the tide was rushing in too quickly. Finding a bit of high ground, Kahn positioned me—a rubber sheet tied around my waist, a shred of an old tent dangling from my shoulder—while Selesnick set up the wooden field camera with its black fabric hood. With Marx Brothers-like timing, they adjusted props and costumes, and eventually themselves, while the self-timer ticked away. High winds and rushing water threatened to topple the camera tripod. The resulting photo is typically whimsical; whether they had the title—*Kürbisgerechtigkeit* (*Gourdjustice*)—in mind, or whether it was a future inspiration that had already passed, they didn't tell me.

A few months later, the pair brought their antics to the Phillips Andover Academy, where they were artists-in-residence last fall. To complete the work in the Beitzel Gallery show, they drafted students and a few faculty members for a series of

studio shots. In one memorable image, titled *Brotmorgendämmerung* (*Breaddawn*), the models march with standards of bread—rye, white, whole wheat, the gamut. (The artists bought out a whole bakery that morning.) The result is among the most historically resonant of the team's images to date—picture Andrea Mantegna's trumpeters and standard-bearers (admired by Kahn/Selesnick at Hampton Court in England) with bits of Breugel, Delacroix, and Odd Nerdrum thrown in.

In fact, the finished work is composed of two separate images of people, plus a backdrop shot several months earlier in Wellfleet—all seamlessly melded with Photoshop software. To this writer (who was, after all, cast as a dispenser of "gourdjustice" by the artists), the use of Photoshop is worrisome. The fakery in earlier Kahn/Selesnick work was decidedly low-tech, and thus only partly effective, leaving a gap between how the scene would have looked in "real" life, and how it did look after being staged, snapped, printed, spliced together, and antiqued. That gap was the territory in which their artistry came to rest, and the chasm into which viewers found themselves quite happily falling.

Photoshop makes it possible to close the gap between what's imagined and what's presented to the public. But seams, not seamlessness, are what Kahn/Selesnick's work has been about. With Photoshop, serendipity is no longer an option; every aesthetic decision is ripe for second-guessing. And so, evocative as the bread photo is, its imperfections read as oversights, rather than as the necessary (and disarming) indicia of process.

It took a lot of tries to get the gourd hanging from my waist where Kahn and Selesnick wanted it. It's possible that next time they won't bother, preferring instead to do the positioning at a computer screen, when the tides aren't rushing and the timer isn't ticking. But is that a step forward or a step back? Does it matter? It may, since to appreciate Kahn/Selesnick is to care about how the work was made. That the making left its mark has always been the artists' great achievement.

Fred Bernstein is an architecture and design writer in New York. He is a contributing editor at Metropolitan Home and Blueprint. This year his work has also appeared in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the New Yorker.

Linda Touby: Abstract Expression without the Angst

The Abstract Expressionists took pride in art that slapped viewers in the face. The best crop of gestural painters today give us comfort food, not confrontation. Viewers today are acculturated to the spastic energy and swirling id of paintings by Hans Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock. Educated people know greatness and they like it, even viscerally. New work in this genre (as long as it stays this side of imitative) gains refracted acceptance, even benefits from nostalgia for the decades when painting was heroic and pure and completely unhinged from any story line.

Linda Touby, a New York artist who shows at Rice/Polak Gallery in Provincetown, taught me this lesson. In a Washington, DC gallery, I watched three collectors compete for one of her ebullient compositions. A lady from Norway and a couple from northern Virginia circled this painting of turquoise on yellow, with a smear of lavender, a squib of black, a torque of red. They cooed. They paced—up close then way back far. Separately, they negotiated with the director. No one offered to describe or assess the work, but it held them tight. And when the red dot was fixed for the Norwegian, she would only divulge, "It makes me happy."

Happy? Remember what the action painters were all about—anxiety. Abstract Expressionism was more an attitude toward making art than a certain style of painting. It entailed a commitment to art's essential subjectivity and to elevated personal emotion as painting's true topics. For the postwar generation of artists, uncorking the unconscious led to paintings animated by anger, doubt, sex, and brute force. Psychic topics were rarely "happy."

Touby is committed to subjectivity. She has faith in painting as an open-ended process. Her work has an Abstract Expressionist vibe, without the violence. What's new is the joy. Touby doesn't really like being compared to men from the '50s. "It's my work, not de Kooning's. Whatever they did, it just happened to be before me. I wasn't consciously attracted to this. It's natural to me," she explains, shrugging and shaking her blonde head. Touby may not like such comparisons, but for the viewer, these references are critical.

The daughter of a painter, Touby grew up in Florida. As a child she was in and out of hospitals for a painful, undiagnosed stomach ailment. To entertain her and stoke the talent she had already shown, Touby's father brought art books to her hospital beds. "I saw everything I needed in those books. The Picassos really got me. I remember seeing Pollock painting on board and thinking, since we didn't have money for canvas, it's okay to paint on anything as long as you are painting."

Touby began treatment at Mt. Sinai Hospital and her family moved to New York, close to collections and art classes. As a teenager, she grew out of sickness and threw herself into painting, studying at the Pratt Institute and the Art Students



SOUTH BEACH XXX, 1997-98

League, where she worked with Richard Pousette-Dart in the 1980s. "He would come once a week and sit in the center of a classroom. It was like the Last Supper," she recalls. "It wasn't theory. It wasn't how to paint this or that. He talked about the spirituality of art, which is second nature to an artist."

Touby describes the process of painting as a kind of frenzy. "I use a lot of power when I paint. I never sit. It's almost like a dance. I'm hyperactive and it spills out into my work. I need to get that energy out. At some point I run out of energy and I'm finished for the day." But Touby—and here's the difference—channels pleasure through that intensity. Her best compositions seem to trumpet, "here's my song," with a full choir for backup. The act of painting well, as she does—with flaring elbows, jousts and jabs, beating back the demons, daring anyone to doubt her, tackling it every day, all day long—makes Touby a painterly heir.

And what inspires her to paint? Elemental things. The "Sand" series was launched in Provincetown. "I first went up for an opening, and I got to go to the beach. It's such a cool light, not like Florida's. White, soft, cool light that molds you. Even if I have the tension of a show, the culture is so open, I feel free." The "Sand" series has that sea, that sand, that mother-of-pearl light, and that appreciation of freedom.

On that afternoon in Washington, DC, in the Alex Gallery, with all attention on a large canvas, I was pulled to something small—*South Beach*, two impastoed eight by eight-inch squares pushed together, so that black and white shapes face off at center and jags of orangey-red skid off in either direction. It's a painting grenade, a compact composition of color contrasts set to go off with the right look. But it's also a very solid object, not skittish or ephemeral, a slab of abstract red meat for a meat-and-potatoes kind of abstraction. This is not "Why are we here?" painting, but "It's good to be alive!" painting.

Touby's small panels are also funny, next to her predecessors' large-scale masterworks, which broke all prior rules regarding size. She could be making maquettes for larger work, or designs for Ab Ex tiles, or even paintings for a baby's room—a baby headed for a lifetime of museum trips. Funny and stunning and popular at the same time. Isn't that heroic enough for us?

Eleanor Kennelly is a freelance journalist who has written for Art & Antiques, ARTnews, Art & Auction, and numerous other publications. She is a former art critic for the Washington Times.

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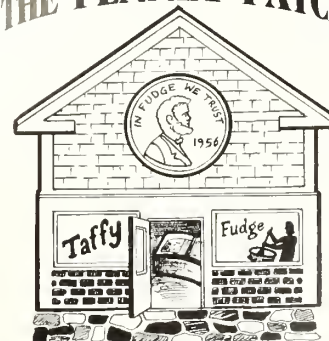
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PAUL BOWEN

Entering **Switch** at Gagosian

I cross the street behind an elderly woman. Her hair is immaculately coifed in a way too young for her years and she wears a full-length fur coat from an animal I can't quite identify. She tentatively opens the door, set in a blank, gray wall on the last block of 24th Street, right by the West Side Highway, where thousands of cars pass every hour. The previous day's snow has quickly melted and everywhere there are puddles of water, mixed with oil and other street filth. Chelsea may be getting stylish, but they don't appear to sweep this block too often.

The woman and I both know what we are looking for—I have seen photographs of Richard Serra's new sculpture, *Switch*, and I expect she has, too. The work consists of six curved steel plates, several inches thick, set on edge, and looming thirteen feet over the viewers' heads. Three pairs of concave arcs form corridors between their double-walls, and leave a vacant triangular space in the center. The whole vaguely resembles an ocean liner's hull. The sculpture is made from Cor-ten steel—a material designed to rust just slightly, then stop, so the rust becomes a weather-proof coating.

Inside the Gagosian gallery, the woman and I hesitate for a moment, not because of the visual impact we might have anticipated, but because we are taken with the sight of twenty or thirty small children sitting with their backs toward the nearest of the steel walls. They sit on the floor, eating lunch, name-tags around their necks and clipboards at their feet with drawings they have made of the leviathan towering idly behind them as if, it too, is taking a break.

The woman asks the children what grade they are in. I cannot hear their teacher's reply because suddenly the deafening sound of hammering comes from the gallery next door, still under construction. The sounds break an otherwise church-like atmosphere. When the hammering stops, it is replaced by the children's high-pitched voices.

Approaching me, the woman asks, "Are we supposed to walk through there?"

I glance down the narrow corridors curving across the huge space and reply, "Yes, it's perfectly safe." As if I don't remember the story of an accidental amputation caused some years ago, while one of Serra's sculptures (improperly rigged by a contractor), was being dismantled. One section toppled, knocking another part of the sculpture over in a domino-like effect, and severed a worker's leg.

As if reading my mind, the woman says, "If I don't come back, tell my husband and kids that I love them."

I watch her enter the sculpture and then follow. Once inside the first of the three corridors, I feel both unsteady and embraced. At times, I have to walk like a skater, one leg crossing over in front of the other. The walls lean asymmetrically and the space narrows, then widens. The ends of the three corridors almost touch, leaving just enough room between them to enter the triangular space.

My family lived within earshot of the railway when I was a child and I remember how sometimes, in the middle of the night, I woke to the sound of the Irish mail train racing through our town on the way to the ferry. I also remember the metal crash from the shunting yards as train cars were added or subtracted. Perhaps it's the sheer power of the sculpture, or the recognition of some quality I hope for in my own work when material and process effortlessly mesh. Either way, I'm walking around grinning when I encounter a small girl separated from her group. I sense that if she perceives any danger, it is from me, not *Switch*.

I think of my own daughter, now eighteen, and turn away to leave, but am stopped by another child, who asks me how the sculpture was made. I search for an answer, something simple, but not patronizing. I imagine the red-hot metal, the rollers at the steel mill squeezing out the massive curved plates. Just as I am about to put this into words, a gallery intern or employee, intervenes. He steers the child away and back to the class gathered around a small paper model of the sculpture.

Flustered, I walk towards the door, feeling rebuffed as a sculptor and a parent. Or perhaps *Switch* itself has made me feel uncertain, small and vulnerable against its giant steel flanks. I exit the gallery, cross the street, turn west, south, then east, navigating the growing puddles of murky water.

Paul Bowen is a sculptor who has lived in Provincetown since 1977. His work is represented in many collections both here and abroad, and has most recently been acquired by the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. For ten years he has coordinated a program at the Provincetown Art Association Museum in which local students curate exhibitions from the permanent collection.

Hiroyuki Hamada: Nature's Wildcard



UNTITLED, 1998-99

Hiroyuki Hamada's show at OK Harris Gallery in New York City this spring featured work made since his residency at the Fine Arts Work Center in 1995, some seen before at DNA Gallery, some newly unveiled. The nine pieces were a good representation of a high-level body of work with a maturity beyond the artist's thirty-one years.

A serious, almost somber feeling surrounds Hamada's pieces, which are wall-hung but sculpture-like in depth. They feel ancient in a way, warranting a quiet attention and respect. Yet there is lightness, too, particularly in the vibrancy of attention to surface and the playful dialogue between process and medium. Hamada consistently uses his preferred materials—enamel, plaster, tar, wax and wood—and keeps the range of color—ecru, sand, umber, ebony—limited and close to nature. He works with and against his materials to create beautiful, rich surfaces.

Hamada's palette of incised circles, drilled holes, cracks, grids, and lines works to communicate the ferocity, balance, or tranquillity in each piece. They are the pulse of his work. The random and precise placement of marks, the depth or shallowness of bored holes, the concentration or sparseness of tooled areas, together create a presence that is solid and confident, but also fragile. Drilled holes, which are in all the works, are in some pieces fine, ordered, and crisp, and in others bored so deep that the underlayers of burlap and plaster are exposed. Like brushstrokes, Hamada's surface treatments allow the viewer to feel the presence of a skilled hand—intense, delicate, and soulful.

The two most recent pieces in the show, both untitled from 1998-99, were effectively placed directly across from each other. The orb-shaped works, each twenty-nine inches in diameter by six inches deep, are classic Hamada. The staid symmetry of the circular shape, as is often the case with his square pieces, works with the irregularities of the surface to ground and contain the asymmetrical, seemingly random elements within.

In one, reticulated holes form comb-like clusters tightly packed throughout the piece. In the other, depth and placement of holes vary; some of the drilled areas look gauged out, or eaten away, mutated. Hamada's work recalls the volatility of nature, the unpredictable collisions that create beauty. Seeing his work is like spying that wildcard. You feel humbled.

What looks random or organic is not. Every crack and fine hole serves a high purpose. Sometimes, from a distance, pieces look almost monochromatic, but closer, subtle variations speak a silent, tight dialogue. In one work from 1997-98, the color of aged ivory warms up and cools down while subtle width variations and hairline shifts of lines are traversed by a vertical row of finely drilled holes that slips but then returns. There is a most delicate curved line that mimics the oval shape of the piece, like a thin membrane barely containing the overall vitality. Hamada is creating peaks and valleys of tension, and every element is crucial.

Key to the feel of his work is the time Hamada spends on each piece. Most take about twelve months; some evolve over a few years. His approach of working for long periods, often returning to the same piece again and again, and his use of tactile materials and processes, create layers of surface manipulation that feel historically weathered, ruin-like. What emerges from his labored process are works steeped in a complexity and depth that is hard to pass by quickly. The viewer is drawn deep to a place that is meditative and appealingly dark.

Hamada writes in his brief notes for this show, "The material itself speaks loudly in some pieces. My nature weighs heavily in others. I like to feel that all of these interlock on different levels and create a certain presence." In conversations what strikes you more than Hamada's well-chosen words are his silences—the mysterious place where he goes to process, absorb, configure. Seeing these pieces, one feels witness to a civilized battle between process and medium, which Hamada captures at a moment of an intense and gorgeous arc.

Dahlia Elsayed is a painter and a writer working in New York.



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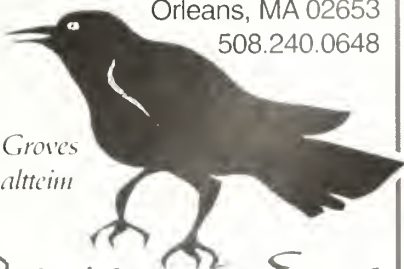
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NICOLA FRANCIS-BURNELL

The Earth, Ocean, and Heavens of **Linda Ohlson Graham**

Linda Ohlson Graham is a gentle woman of many talents. Among the most frequent guests on WOMR's "Poet's Corner," she shares, in soft, dulcet tones, her thoughts on life, the earth, and the universe. "The path can be arduous and labyrinthic," Graham recites from her *Journal Immediately Following a Near-death Experience*, "though we must find refuge from a materialistic, vacuous world." Graham has been recording stream-of-consciousness thoughts and aphorisms since minor brain surgery in 1993. "My favorite one-liner in the book is 'God's name is Art,'" she says.

Graham is now working on a book called *Earth Ocean Heavens*, which incorporates poetry and philosophical insights inspired by her own experiences. Graham's story is a fascinating one, conveyed not only through her poetry, but through her photographs, which will also grace the book, and can be found in cafés, libraries, and galleries Capewide.

"I believe art is truly inspired and that inspiration comes from a higher plane," she states. Inspiration has also come from the painter J.M.W. Turner. Graham co-directed, and lived in, the Turner Museum, in Denver, from 1984 to 1996. Turner, whose atmospheric sunrises and Romantic English landscapes anticipated the French Impressionist movement, has influenced Graham's photography. "The way Turner captured light was just phenomenal," Graham says. "Living in the midst of all that art, floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall, was like living in Heaven!"

Graham records nature's evocative palette. *Bird Of Paradise ... Wellfleet* presents a stunning sunrise of fiery colors that are so intense you can almost feel their energetic vibration. A single seagull claims a deep orange sky infused with violet rays. "I do my best to include as much sky in my images as possible," Graham says. "That may be a result of having spent so much time in the presence of Turner's art, which depicted big skies."

In a photograph entitled *Hammond Castle*, Graham captures an impressionistic image of intense color and liquid light that flows toward the bottom of a steep, winding stairwell. Thick, gray stones soften under a lantern's illumination—reaching around the curved wall, casting a golden, glowing reflection over the brick floor below. A random splash of scarlet paint adds depth to this ethereal perspective.

Living on Cape Cod provides Graham with an unlimited banquet of first-light visions and dissolving horizons. "I'll see a sky that will knock my socks off and will often drive to the ocean to photograph it." This was the case with *A Glimpse of Paradise #2*, which captures forever those evanescent moments just before sunlight transforms a black and white world into a colorful canvas.



EARTH OCEAN HEAVENS, 1978

Graham's fascination with the elements grew over the five years she spent sailing, with time in the Caribbean. "What I wanted more than anything as a child was to travel to faraway places and to meet peoples of the world." She met her desire, traveling to Haiti and the San Blas Islands of Panama with a dear friend in the 1970s. "I traveled nearly 15,000 miles—at an average of five knots," Graham laughs. Even after they survived a tornado that beached and destroyed their first boat, their passion for the open seas remained constant. She used a star finder to learn about the constellations. "The night sky was our world for half the day," she says. "The magnificence of the universe around us was just amazing." During this period at sea Graham developed a deep connection not only to the ocean and giant sky, but to herself. "The forces within ourselves can be as tumultuous as the forces of nature," Graham says. "In life you experience storms and you weather through them."

Now living in Wellfleet, Graham has developed her own way to access the peace and universal connection she experienced on the open seas. She learned how to meditate and chant while in Haiti. During her first meditation she recalls a "visual of the heavens inside my mind, as if I were traveling in space." This revelation altered Graham's perception of what it means to travel. "It made me realize that all the open space that I had ever longed for was available to me when I quieted my thoughts. The space within me was as great, if not greater, than all the outer space."

Graham also believes that meditation can open up her mind to receive subtle life-enhancing guidance. "Sometimes when I meditate, very clear, one-line directions come into my mind. For years I have based my life on that inner guidance. I really think humanity can realize ways to solve our world's problems by quieting our minds for awhile and listening." Each person, Graham claims, is energetically connected with the heavens through the chakra system. She teaches orbital grounding, a yoga technique that opens up the crown chakra to connect with the heavens. "Heaven isn't some other place, some other time. It's right here in the midst of us." Unlike Turner's raging seas, Graham's landscapes and seascapes are calm. She expresses a profound interpretation of life as a magical, spiritual journey and inspires us to stop, take in the view, and savor a deep, cleansing breath. "My deepest desire in life is to be a positive influence for healing on the planet. I'm striving to create images that touch people very deeply within, that might give them a still point or elicit a feeling they've never felt before."

Nicola Francis-Burnell is a healer, teacher, and writer living on the Cape.

CHRISTOPHER BUSA

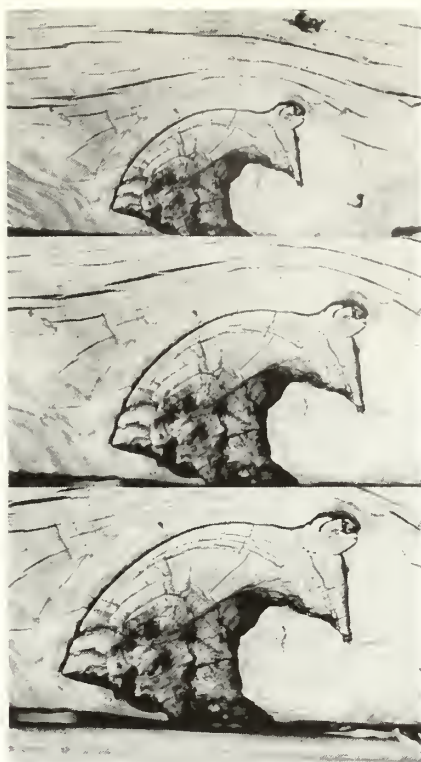
Close Encounters with **Al Wasserman**

In his most recent, ongoing series of photographs, "Close Encounters," Al Wasserman plays wittily with concepts of scale, especially the idea that the big is closer than the tiny. He prefers to enlarge by magnifying the complexity of the small. Working mostly in Provincetown, fifty miles out to sea on a thin spit of sand, the sky becomes huge and human beings small. Here, the hardly noticeable becomes the central subject.

Wasserman's choices in still photography have evolved logically from the lessons he learned during a forty-year career as a documentary filmmaker. When he joined CBS News in the early '50s, the television documentary was in its infancy. Wasserman used the documentary to tell a story. He understood that film, unlike print, was more emotional than informational, and he used film to involve viewers' feelings. Rather than present fact-filled surveys, Wasserman focused on people and their stories to embody large thematic ideas—an approach that helped shape the nature of the medium. His 1956 film, *Out of Darkness*, which followed the treatment of a schizophrenic patient over many months, was television's first feature-length documentary. A significant forerunner of *cinéma vérité*, it remains a classic. By the time Wasserman retired at age sixty-five (following a decade as a *60 Minutes* producer), he had made over seventy-five films and earned almost every major honor, including an Academy Award.

Having long spent a few weeks per year in Provincetown in snatched vacations, Wasserman and his wife, Barbara, began to enjoy extended seasons of four months each. A neighbor, Joel Meyerowitz, had already published his celebrated book of color photographs, *Cape Light*, and was a familiar figure on the beach. Once he found his location, Meyerowitz stood patiently, surveying the scene with bird-like darts of his body. What was he looking for? Wasserman wondered. For a certain pattern of ripples? The reflection soon to be cast by a slow-moving cloud? A shift in the tone of the light? The process was mysterious, its solitary nature seductive. At low tide, in full view of seagulls, Meyerowitz set his enormous, heavy Deardorff camera on the tripod and descended under a trail of dark cloth to look at a stately world that was upside down and backwards.

Wasserman possessed an old 35mm Nikon camera, used occasionally for family snapshots. He dug it out of the closet and began taking pictures. With a light meter on permanent loan from his son-in-law, plus some new lenses, he began prowling the shoreline on a daily basis. At low tide, he studied the high water marks etched into the wooden pilings of the bulkheads of the beach houses. His pockets bulging with lenses, his neck a place to hold the strap for his camera and light-meter, Wasserman became comfortable with the tools of his trade.



PYRAMID, 1999

What began casually soon became obsessive, or rather a way to chart his own path in seeking visual themes he could explore in depth. One summer he watched the interactions of shadows and reflections on the surface of the water. Shadows, cast by boats or other objects, became obedient to the slow passage of the sun. Reflections were under the control of the photographer. A small change in position allowed him to create another pattern. Wasserman showed these photographs at the Cortland Jessup Gallery for a decade.

His latest work is the consequence of a new 60mm macro lens, ideal for extreme close-ups. His old territory is suddenly transformed, and the bulkheads reveal on minute inspection a world Wasserman never suspected. His sense of scale dislocated, he finds himself enlarging the whorls in a knot of weathered wood. So extreme is the close-up, the grain looks like rutted land in an aerial photograph of a vast strip mine. At the same time, this photograph of a knot of wood is larger than the actual knot.

Often, Wasserman presents variations of one image in a diptych, or a triptych, so that the first image seems eerily flopped, like a reflection in moving water. In one collage of three photographs, pictured here, the subject appears in three different sizes. These shifts in scale reveal something cumulative, like the organic repetition of fossil forms in a spiraling nautilus shell, where you see the earlier parts replicated in larger and later parts.

Perhaps it is tangential, but it seems worth noting that if Wasserman's film documentaries focused on people, his still photography stubbornly refuses to violate the privacy of people. His discomfort with making portraits may be likened to the nature writing of Annie Dillard, who learned to write about rocks and insects because their feelings could not be hurt.

Christopher Busa writes elsewhere in the pages about Tony Vevers.

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Ellen Gallagher

Read: Slippage

Across the small yard between my apartment and the Stanley Kunitz Common Room at the Fine Arts Work Center, I rushed to see Ellen Gallagher's slide lecture. Though I had never seen her work nor even heard of her before my fellowship, I was anxious to see her presentation after a local artist described her paintings to me. He explained how she laid dozens of sheets of penmanship paper onto large canvases, then added images to the abstract field with oil, ink, and pencil. Highlighting the images, his right index finger calmly circled into his left palm, tracing out tiny and numerous "sambo or coon lips and eyes." Without hesitation, he shifted easily from one field of meaning to another, as though "sambo or coon lips and eyes" could be shared as easily as neutral abstract fields.

His description reminds me of similarly palpable constructions of the racialized body in two literary landscapes. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe introduces Topsy, a twelve-year-old slave purchased for the St. Clare estate, as a "freshly-caught specimen ... [whose] round shining eyes, glittering as glass beads, moved with quick and restless glances over everything in the room. Her mouth, half open with astonishment ... [her] black, glassy eyes glittered with a wicked drollery." John Stedman, in his *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, also fixates on a slave's eyes and mouth. Describing "the Mulatto maid Joanna," who would later become his "Surinam wife," he writes, "Her eyes, as black as ebony, were large and full of expression, bespeaking the goodness of her heart ... her lips a little prominent which, when she spoke, discovered two regular rows of pearls as white as mountain snow."

In fact, I am often reminded of Topsy's and Joanna's faces, which seem to reappear everywhere, recalling and recreating meaning in endless repetition: Martin Lawrence's exaggerated eyes on the side of a bus advertising the movie *Life* ... Whoopi Goldberg's shining eyes and teeth gleaming above and below her bath of Milk (might we might want to drink *her*?) ... An anonymous large dark woman's face, eyes pointing the shopper to the Energizers, on sale at the A&P ... Grant Hill with a cartoon chicken on top of his head, his eyes bugged out and leering up to the happy bird on the back of the Corn Flakes box.

As I entered the Common Room, I looked for the eyes and lips that I expected and came to see, but instead I saw a slide depicting more recent work—a large black field made up of what appeared to be shiny dried fish scales, some layered



DREXCIYA, 1997

and fixed, some gaping, others in the midst of peeling away. I sat near the front of the room, staring up into the slide, looking to find, somewhere, the charged signs. Yet the image revealed something else—sporadic rows of markings on the canvas; I thought of rows of geese in flight, their motion stopped against a black sky. There were thin outlines of clouds that *could* be read as lips, but they were jelly-fish delicate and porous. Some tiny outlines were carbuncled around perfect T-squares, while others unhinged, moving loose and free. The marks seemed to unorganize meaning, even within their own patterns.

Neville Wakefield describes the experience of seeing Ellen Gallagher's work as being "set adrift [in] fields of uninterrupted pleasure" or "in the pure state of abstract minimalism" before discovering an "itinerant minstrel show" equipped with a "delirious jumpin' jive of thick grinning lips, whites of eyes, and pickaninny heads." Another critic, Helen Swords, recounts how the surface of the painting *Paper Cup* "is almost saturated by minute and endlessly reprinted full-lipped mouths, shaped like split bananas." She continues, "These are overtly repetitious representations of the racist icons of negro eyes and lips created by the 19th-century minstrel shows." Okwui Enwezor writes that Gallagher "makes gorgeous abstract works of deceptively calm, pleasurable sea surfaces ... Beneath this though, lies a more discordant purpose that purportedly carries [a] kind of political content (read: race)."

My introduction to Gallagher's work followed these instructive models. In generic terms, I moved from abstract background to concrete

foreground, interpreting identifiable "racist icons." However, as I saw the slides, here, in the black spaces, where I imagined clouds breaking apart, birds and mouths in thin and mutating lines, I knew I was seeing something that extended beyond the presumed socio-historical charge, beyond the parenthetical directive, "(read: race)."

In a slide detail of the painting *Drexciya* are heads with flaming, fat tilde S-whooshes of orange and yellow hair, brown and peach faces, blue and brown eyes (no whites, simply blotted irises), whose engorged pink lips and large orange-red tongues flick after round disembodied white and blue dotted cell-like eyeballs. During her lecture, Gallagher described imagining black nurses swimming in the ocean, caring for pregnant women and babies who were thrown from slave ships. When did the bodies of drowning women and children become only eyes, with orange-red tongues jetting after them, each sign floating, disconnected? Or is the tongue a bit of hair that emerges through the body, one stroke of orange paint fusing through another, making fluid the very notion that any of these signs are fixed to any particular construction or material category? (Read: slippage.)

Throughout her talk, Gallagher offered a few terms through which her work could be viewed, namely: "black inscrutability," "the not readable" and "the speculative." These terms lay in contrast to the way her work's signs are often read by others—as enthusiastically noted indications of race with little interrogation beyond their discordant charges, little reexamination within the fractured and in-flux socio-psychological landscape from which they build and repeat. In an interview with Thyra Nichols Goodeve, Gallagher said, "The imagery I use does signify race. The problem is people get stuck there. It becomes the only thing the work is seen as being about ... people seem to stop at what the work looks like, rather than see what is *manifesting*. [emphasis mine] People go off saying they see these sambos, mammies, pickinies, and I go what sambos, mammies, pickinies? You choose whether you want to enter my subjectivity ... the one place where the work can be seen to be about race."

Looking at Gallagher's work through *her* subjectivity, rather than a given objectivity, creates this fluidity of iconography. "Sambo or coon lips and eyes" is too static a container; it forecloses meaning, relying on a fixed understanding of the racialized body within a set social and historical framework. Gallagher's iconography is not fixed, nor is there a one-to-one relationship between the body and how it is has been historically inscribed or named. Instead, she attempts to find and create what she describes as a "language

around those images. The language as a site ... The language as a way to keep those images off our body."

During the lecture, Gallagher, confessing back pain, described the extremely labor intensive quality of her painting. She drew parallels between the physical exhaustion of painting and her previous work as a carpenter and a fisherman. For her, the repetition in painting particular symbols, again and again, emphasizes the labor process itself, which she constantly draws from and incorporates back into her art. Her emphasis on labor creates new contexts, alluding to the work involved in keeping these images "off our body."

In *Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes writes, "How can the text 'get itself out' of the war of fictions?" And he answers, "[B]y a gradual labor of extenuation ... effecting by transmutation (and no longer only by transformation), a new philosophical state of the language-substance." In Gallagher's attempt to "get these images off our body," she offers a "language-substance" that abandons presumed ideas in phrases like "sambo or coon lips and eyes." As she speculates, so must the viewer, entering her psychological and subjective landscape of not only lips and eyes, but tongues, heads, hair, faces, all broken apart into shapes and fields, meticulously and laboriously, again and again, transmuted, extenuated, painted and then re-painted, imagined and then re-imagined.

Gallagher's work intersects with the narratives of Stowe and Stedman, which rely upon and purport fictive constructions of race. Topsy's round shining eyes stagger, glittering across Stowe's page, mediating her slave body as it evolves into the construction of her black character. And as Joanna's eyes denote "a goodness of the heart," her face is deconstructed down to color and material, "black" and "ebony," then into designations of space, where her eyes are "large" and "full" enough to allow any reader to enter the body of a slave, a new continent, or both. Gallagher, too, brings the viewer into a history of the staggered, fragmented, and open black body. She creates a language of materials and space, through paint, which understands that the body works in relation to a set of icons whose meanings and affects are constantly manifesting within a racialized universe. Here, meaning is dislodged from context, implicitly uncontained and speculative, unbound by seemingly fixed historical signs around race. Gallagher recognizes 18th- and 19th-century modes of racist representations, but reanimates them within her own subjective and imagined iconography.

At P.S.1's "Greater New York" show this spring, I see, finally, in an untitled work from 1996, that penmanship paper I had been promised. My own eyes drive into the rows of white eyeballs with black irises, bobbing around in furious and various directions—some aiming to the left, some right, some outward towards the viewer, and all set within a dense and resistant layer of rabbit skin glue. Thin lines of exposed canvas divide each sheet of paper, making tiny rope-like gashes, splitting some eyes in half. The canvas is marked by several small punctures, like stab wounds, interstices through which the eyes' meanings might, at any time, slip. Where both Stedman and Stowe offer

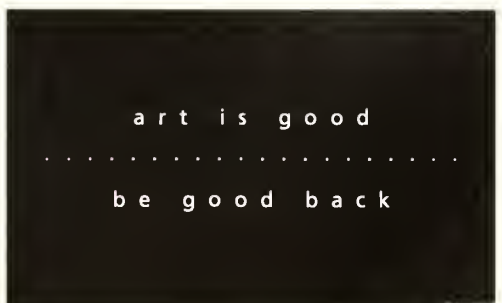
material constructions of "race" that culminate in speculative notions of character, Gallagher places fissures, splits between the signs. Where there should be another eye, perhaps a "jumpin' jive" disruption, Gallagher offers physical and material disruption, an open well, another, and then another, through which the viewer him or herself might enter the canvas, slip behind the surface signs.

From a distance, the painting could be read as caucasian flesh tint, particularly alongside its companion here, an untitled work from 1999. I am stunned by its pitch blackness, its size (twelve by eight feet), as well as its reflective surface of rubber, paper, and enamel. I turn my head back and forth and see a series of reflections—a woman wearing a red sweater and white boa, no, not a sweater, a jacket; I can, if I angle my body, even make out her brown hair. I see a small crowd forming around the painting as I stand inches in front of its surface. I see myself, but cannot make out the color of my eyes.

There are no lips, no faces, no eyes in the painting. There is, however, part of a body—gigantic head, neck, and one shoulder turned away from the viewer. The form is meticulously detailed with, amongst other symbols, the S-woosh symbols from *Drexciya*. Where these signs in *Drexciya* sit atop multitudes of nurses' heads, below white caps in an imagined sea, here, the markings are congealed around one enormous figure, all black and building around precise etchings laid on top of one another. How do these signs, newly formed, disrupt any static understanding of the language in the earlier paintings? How do they confuse any real understanding of one sign as it transmutes from one white canvas into the shiny black enamel surface of another? To find out, the viewer, like me, might turn from one painting to the next, from rows of many tiny eyes to a single huge head that looks back into its own depth.

Much detail in the left half of the head and torso is flattened by a smooth coat of rubber and enamel. As though eclipsing her own trail, Gallagher covers over even the possibility of reading these signs, forcing us back to the reflective black surface. In the viewer's own reflection is Gallagher's subjectivity, where meaning manifests through the shared labor between painter and viewer. I am taken through each intricate detail, and finally to an inscrutable flat black space, to reflect beyond any static inscriptions, beyond terms, uncontained and staggering, outward and back, to consider, again and again, Gallagher's infinite signs.

Ronaldo V. Wilson's poetry appears in these pages.



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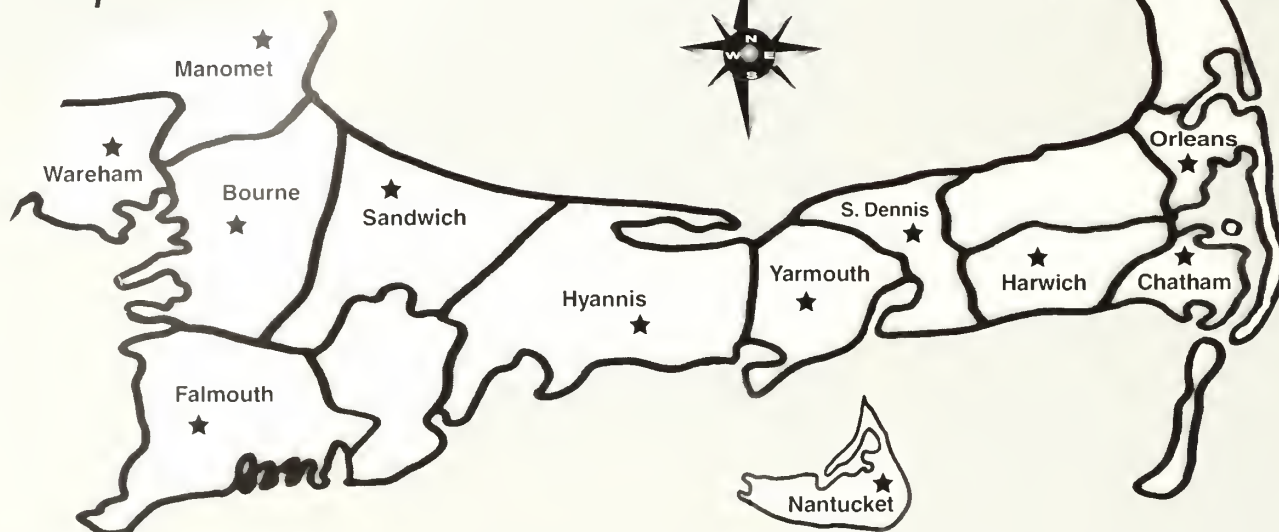
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Evidence: The Art of Candy Jernigan

Edited by Laurie Dolphin

Chronicle Books

A copy of Candy Jernigan's *Evidence* appeared on my porch on a cold, damp day and out jumped a world. The broken pieces of experience, the crumbs fallen between the cracks, I found refashioned into transport. Once I asked a Chinese friend of mine about the Chinese notion of happiness. She told me that the Chinese do not pursue happiness. Instead they seek to be useful in the world, and from that they gain satisfaction.

Candy Jernigan discovered the utility of ephemera—of torn tickets, leaves, food smears, restaurant receipts, ashes, dust, boarding passes, airplane menus, seeds, sand, pop tops, crack vials, gum wrappers, cigarette packages, toilet paper—and from this she gained the pleasure of creation. This ephemera, this stuff, is the vocabulary of her journals, of her witnessing of the world, of her marking and tracing her time on earth. I did not know Candy, but from what I have read, she seems to have deeply affected those close to her. She was unlucky in the brevity of her life, dying of cancer at thirty-nine, but lucky in those friends she had, in their support and love for her, and in this wonderful volume of her journals they assembled. Married to the composer Philip Glass, Candy worked in the studio of the esteemed graphic designer Paul Bacon, and counted among her intimates such notables as Chuck Close. *Evidence*, however, stands firmly on ground carefully staked out by Candy herself.

My favorite section is called "Evidence of Travel." As an inveterate journal-keeper and collector of bits and pieces myself, pasting my own boarding passes and ticket stubs into my notebooks, I threw myself into the pleasure of traipsing with Candy through Paris, Italy, India, Gambia, Brazil, Florida, and Mexico. From her collected "evidence" we learn what plants grow on the graves of the famous in Père La-Chaise Cemetery, for she has pasted down each leaf, carefully noting which illustrious person it is attached to. We know what she ate for lunch at the Flea Market in Clignancourt because she stained her journals with smears of the sausage, beer, mustard, frites, hot sauce, and wine she devoured. It was a Catalan wine she drank, we know, because she enjoyed the label enough to soak it off the bottle and stick it in her book. In Rome, we learn she was so smitten by St. Peter's she missed an appointment in Trastevere. And from the Yucatan, two pages crowded with visions of yellow—Chiclets packets, squashed Squirt caps, the leaf from an hibiscus plant playing against the cool ocean blues of a tourist postcard—radiate the heat and beauty of the ruins of Tulum.

The sense of urgency, the crammed fullness, the slightly messy quality of the design, are what I find most compelling about these travel pages. She has so much to tell and so much to remember! Even more than memory there is the sense that in ordering experience, in saving and rationalizing

all this "stuff," there is salvation, there is an okayness with the world. I feel this most keenly in the little plastic bags of dust, sand, cobwebs that Candy collects, reminiscent of reliquaries, holy earth, the healing power of certain dirt. Again, the Chinese. When they leave their birthplace, they take a bit of the earth with them, which, wrapped in a red bag and placed under their new beds, reconnects them with their roots.

The sections on "Urban Evidence," "Worldwide Evidence," "Mathematical Evidence," and "Evidence of Food" have a slightly different tone. A more scientific, systematic, formal Candy emerges. The pages are whiter and cleaner; the "evidence" more artfully designed. A more practiced wit and humor come into play. In *Christmas Tree: Rockefeller Center* in "Urban Evidence," we find bits and pieces of the famous tree, a tiny twig, a chewed pretzel, some electrical wire, splayed out as specimens on a white page. In *Found Dope*, Parts I and II, she displays the crack vials and transparent dope bags she found littered on the streets of her neighborhood, and then draws us a beautiful map of exactly where she found them. In *Pot Crushed on Houston*, a squashed aluminum pot is placed against an ink-smeared page. On the bottom of the page, Candy tells a tiny story in tiny writing about how she found the pot, stashed it in her pocketbook, and then "forgot it." This story reveals volumes about Candy. How great and huge and interesting that pocketbook must have been to have hidden a forgotten crushed pot!

Colored pencil and pastel drawings of pop-tops, gum wrappers, matches, ticket stubs note the same sort of evidence Candy includes in actual form in her travel books. Beautifully drawn, reminiscent of early David Hockney, these studies seem less compelling than when she presents the real thing. But perhaps that is the point. Candy plays off the actual and the drawn beautifully; in *Mexican Matches, Yucatan*, she juxtaposes nine used, burnt matches against nine drawn ones. The eye has a marvelous time jumping between the "real" and the drawn reality.

"Landscapes," "Natural Evidence," "Psychological Evidence," and "Rejectamenta" possess the more personal feel of the travel journals. Scribbles, drips, and smears interact with the text of dreams, images of flying couches, and glimpses of landscapes that flash by as if seen from a speeding car. These pages feel unsettled, anxious, and, particularly in "Psychological Evidence," display the kind of urgency seen in the travel journals. This urgency, unlike that in the travel journals, is harnessed to an impending sense of mortality rather than to the inhalation of experience. Phrases such as "Is this it?" and "Gone but not forgotten" appear on and haunt these pages. The painting is expressive, almost angry. Red and black arrows flying against violent swirls of color warn us of danger as we contemplate a "real" knife and an image of a house with an ungrounded antenna.

One closes this book with the feeling of having gone on a wild and glorious ride and regretting that it is over so quickly. Transported to lands both close to home and foreign, one sees what is familiar in a new way and what is unfamiliar with



CANDY JERNIGAN,
POT CRUSHED
ON HOUSTON,
c. 1985-86

books

immediacy and wonder. You discover what you never knew you needed to know. Yes, I want to know the difference between a sheet of toilet paper taken from the Louvre on April 6, 1982, and one liberated from the Pompidou on the 12th of that same month. And, yes, of course this particular piece can only be titled *April in Paris*.

—CHRISTINA SCHLESINGER

Christina Schlesinger is a painter, muralist, and maker of artist books who lives in East Hampton, New York.



Bewitched Playground

David Rivard

Graywolf Press

"Caution: Baby on Board." You could hang that sign on David Rivard's new book of poems, *Bewitched Playground*, and some critics will. But it would serve only to trick the small-minded away, or prepare the more adventurous reader for a new kind of ride, with a brilliant, warping mind behind the wheel. In fact, *Bewitched Playground* is all the more strange and seizing for being inhabited by a loving wife and a beautiful child. We expect our artists to be tragic, so there is something very backward and powerful about a gifted poet extending his investigations into (at least occasional) domestic daily happiness.

The Rivard trip began with two earlier, award-winning books, *Torque* and *Wise Poison*. Fueled by experience and disguised as someone like himself, Rivard has always driven us straight to the center of our own America—the emergency of its existences and cast beauty of its singular moments. *Torque* started off, naturally enough, in a hometown, on its street corners and bridges, in the factories and bars with firemen and aging high school basketball stars, often stuck, often drinking. Rivard's controlled abilities are revealed in these early poems: he takes the battered, used, sometimes beautiful metal of this life and contorts it into exquisite works. The result is not life as it should be, or could be, but something of a much more tortured and gorgeous utility—how life is, if we look and listen honestly. And Rivard's listening is with the mouth and tongue, those muscles of our imagination, the tools of poetry.

There is an Americanness in Rivard's earlier work that our fiction writers endlessly pursue. This is the land of factory workers and alcoholics, of Carver and Algren. In these fictions, characters arrive at some pregnant and awful truth about their humanity, but this intense moment is left silent, untouched by authorial intrusion. The climax is so loaded, yet so unspoken, that much of these stories' power exists in the reader's intense desire to know it, to have a character intelligent and eloquent enough to give this truth the words it deserves. This is what Rivard accomplishes, and it can stun—not because he completes some previously unfulfilled narrative, but because we are brought to an intimate understanding of American truths.

With *Wise Poison*, the Rivard experience escaped into the wider world. These are poems of the years when "I kept my own counsel,/always acting/generous & satisfied, an impersonator/of the helpful, my plots & schemes/disguised." This is the poet as our own undercover agent—a sly, perfect observer, writing, it seems, of a time before he realized he was a writer, but already taking notes with a razor eye.

Rivard's past work has shown the rich rewards of exploring America from the underbelly. (Jon Anderson compares him to Kerouac, "not in form, but in conscience.") But the power that the lives of the down-and-out lends to writing can become an easy crutch. The down-and-out and on the fringe, after all, don't read the literature that writes them; their lives are elsewhere. Our American characters can't articulate their dilemmas, in part because they are unaware of them. We, the readers, live here—in the well-fed, well-educated America that is an altogether different down-and-out. Rivard is smart enough to let his material evolve with his talent, rather than leaving it behind in the easy and practiced dirt. *Bewitched Playground* takes us to the center of what our lives truly are—to the mall, the museum, weddings, to car seats and tulip planting, to bathing a child. And for this, Rivard's formidable skill as a poet becomes all the more insidious. He is truly among us, and he is watching, listening, letting our ordinary, tragic, perfect lives drive his imagination.

Don't be fooled, these are not *New Yorker* poems. These are not familiar, choking emotional terrain navigated with no harder questioning than, "Ho-hum, what is the meaning of human existence in late afternoon as the leaves dapple down." Confronted with such poetry, many of our most gifted younger poets have pulled away, toward a more brilliant surface of words. Rivard attacks. He is not here to admire the world, to take a warm bath in it, nor does he retreat from it, setting himself to some abstracted project (perhaps freezing the bathwater and breaking it up into jagged glistening chunks). Rivard goes into the world and, with his presence of imagination, reshapes it.

"Forced to say what living feels like," begins the speaker of "Home," priming us for a moment of reflection. But, immediately, reflection is complicated: "And then/forced to act out that feeling." The layers of experience are not simply given to this speaker, "forced" as he is to a strangely active inquiry. Acting out the feeling of living is a more involved and inquisitive life than just living. In this case, the feeling is "home," and sometimes hinted at even "by something small as the taste say/of piped-in 20th-century water./Then it goes. The glass empties, & takes/the moment with it. The moment/goes, constantly./Thoughtlessly. Faithfully."

The ineffable "it" that we search for, that is both abstract and essential in our lives, is given a name in this book's opening poem. "My Cliff" is a short, singing meditation that serves as invocation and prayer. Whether it is to an actual cliff, lover, or muse that the poet sings, it is "Like everything else mine—/I don't own it, I walk around outside its life." But the speaker does not lament this gap. Here is a poet in partnership with the world, announcing the assistance we all need to find feeling. "I lie down//

Where I can be swept by warm rain/that has crossed water/deep & so wide/I cannot get over alone."

The ordinary things that help us and bring us happiness run through the pages of *Bewitched Playground*. In "Temptation," we find that the worst of our bargain with these things is that "silently we must/as a requirement agree to die." But those who fight this fact, those "melancholiacs who shudder among us" who "won't/be tempted to be ordinary," only make themselves unable to love this life.

In "What I Know," the happiness of bathing a baby daughter is set after two surreal, almost psychotic, "historical" happinesses—that of a woman who remembers "being a cold bullet/fallen in a field of/trampled spring clover/without having hit anyone/lying there dead or groaning," and that of a man who "remembers so clearly/his life long ago/as that aspiring but naive piece of parchment/on which a tribe of mistrustful lords/and barons/wrote the Magna Carta." To that, Rivard can add what he knows—and it also comes caught in tangles of imagination, in words that drive the tongue to feel and fumble with them. He knows "happiness squealing."

That daily joys and moments produce, and are a product of, imagination is intrinsic to the Rivard's process. "America" is the kind of brain-changing, culture-crunching poem that shows us the creative firepower required to retake the prosaic landscapes of our lives. That the poem is set in the weekend mall only goes further to suggest it as a modern *Ars Poetica*/*Ars Vita*. In fact, "it is late Sunday in the brain" when the poet encounters a woman breast-feeding her eighteen-month-old daughter, and tells her (silently, to the reader) she might think he is "weird enough/to see in the baffling dear creature you are/a classical subject for a civilized poet in an innocent land,/such as ours would be./In that poem you would still be a woman/but made-out now as a beautiful thinly tall broomstick." And he goes on, to imagine her, to want to reveal himself to her. The poem ends with a plea, a dare almost, for this stranger to enter the poet's imagination, simply by asking her way into it. "I want you to know these things./So what are you waiting for?/Go ahead, ask./Don't hold your breath,/if you want to breathe,/my beautiful broom."

This power of imagination that is life, that is breath, is so for all of us. The speaker of "Guests of the Wedding" imagines an entire life for a tattooed "lovely citizen" and then asks, "To own another person, completely, in the imagination./How else do you teach yourself/what you wish to become?/And isn't it/one after another after another after another/the many things men & women wish to be?" This is the essence of Rivard's poetic intelligence—to pose a question with exacting articulation that is as slippery as the answers we need. His talent enables him to make a pleasurable recitation of questions studded with so many addictive syntactical portals that our mind demands re-readings. These poems are the bewitched playgrounds that keep us gaming through their curious structures until answers come to inhabit our blood unworded, like the pleased exhaustion of children.

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Venus, c. 1948

gallery

PETER BUSA

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Exquisite construction of the tough questions is only one of many methods Rivard uses to dissect our minds. *Bewitched Playground* displays a wide range of formal innovation. The torqued and teased syntax of this work is as remarkable as the content that drapes over its precise designs. The poet's use of line compresses and accelerates its material, allowing thoughts to flow hard together, or pace rhythmically apart. And, even when the source of a poem's inspiration is uncomplicated, Rivard can place its speaker at any exact or complex angle. That is, exactly where the reader needs to be.

The poem "Daydream" begins, "Wishes need/ people,/constantly." This exceptional collection proves that in the ongoing poetic experiment with human needs, David Rivard is one of those rare and endangered scientists: he searches without destroying.

—ROBERT STRONG

Robert Strong's poetry appears in these pages.



Seeing Through Places: Reflections on Geography and Identity

by Mary Gordon
Scribner

Mary Gordon's newest book, *Seeing Through Places: Reflections on Geography and Identity*, is a beautiful collection of thematically linked essays that revisit the places of her past through the interpretative lens of the present. The essays, though weighted toward childhood—her grandmother's house, her babysitter's house, camp and churches—take us to her current position as an English professor at Barnard College. The narrative is non-chronological—after her father dies in one essay, he shows up in the next, jangling his pocket change—but is held together by treatment of place as a condition of the imagination, as much as a physical space. Time itself comes unmoored from reality as Gordon embraces the extra-temporal realities of our lives—the mythic, imagistic, metaphoric—even while anchoring her writing in the concrete details that give memory its powerful hold.

Gordon, the daughter of an Irish-Italian Catholic mother and a Jewish father who converted to Catholicism, grew up post-WW II in a Long Island suburb. Her father was an intellectually ambitious but financially unsuccessful writer; her mother, a secretary, paid the bills. Gordon describes her parents as "serious people," brought together by their faith, married on the threshold of middle age. Often at odds with her mother's extended family and with the values of their suburban community, Gordon's family found

togetherness only in its devotion to the Church. She writes about herself as an odd, dreamy child, at once stubbornly self-sufficient and achingly lonely. Growing up in an atmosphere of grave spiritual intensity and constant bickering over money woes, Gordon often felt like an impostor-child, a grown-up in a child's body. She didn't see the point of other children's play, and she found comfort only in incessant reading and the gloomy romance of her parent's religion (*Fifteen Saints for Girls* was a favorite childhood book). When Gordon was seven her father died of a heart attack and she and her mother moved into her grandmother's house, a place that haunts this book and figures prominently in her struggle for an identity independent of her family and religion.

The opening essay, "My Grandmother's House," is the tour de force of the book, combining the ruminative complexity of a master essayist with the inexorable plot pull of a Shakespearean tragedy. Before her father's death, Gordon is often left at her grandmother's house by one of her busy parents; she fears this place—its gruesome crucifixion paintings, its rectitude—but she also "knew it was a privilege to be in that house." All the objects there seem to hearken back to a mythic, ancestral past that the young Gordon identifies as having "nothing to do with America." Soon after Gordon and her mother move in with her grandmother, the interior is redecorated, at the insistence of an aunt, in the style of the day. Gordon watches as wall-to-wall carpeting is installed, as throw pillows replace doilies. "From that day on," Gordon writes, "my grandmother grew old. She went on cleaning and cooking, but the charmless modern surfaces she tended gave her no joy. For the first time in her life, she was the victim of minor illnesses. She got colds and sore throats; she sprained her ankle; she took naps in the afternoon. In a year, she was diagnosed with stomach cancer, and in two years she was dead." The permeability between the body and its environment is revisited again and again in these essays. Indeed, Gordon's humble subjects inspire wide-ranging, meaty ruminations on faith, greed, the nature of identity. After finishing "My Grandmother's House" a question lingered with me: What cultural and social spaces are *now* being eclipsed in our headlong rush toward the new?

In "Boulevards of the Imagination," Gordon takes New York City as her subject. She recalls the New York of her girlhood imagination, where European war refugees holed up in Central Park West apartments, playing violins and reading philosophy, and the New York in which she, as a teacher, writer, and culture-creator, has now earned a place. Although the adult Gordon's New York is the most "real," we are left with an indelible sense of all these New Yorks existing in tandem—and somehow in dialogue. But Gordon can also stick to the script when she wants to. "A Room in the World" is a fairly traditional treatment of place, a paean to the artistic succor and soul-pleasing beauty Gordon found while summering in a Truro beach house.

The dialectic of the Catholic struggle—between sin and absolution, guilt and grace—forms a powerful current in Gordon's writing. Her faith can be traced from a devout, obsessive variety, to a more self-accepting and joyous kind that she begins to discover while in Rome, sitting in the shadow of Saint Peter's, with her "back turned on the Vatican." In contemplating issues of faith, Gordon's metaphorical language sometimes fails her. Take, for example, an episode involving Father B., a liberal priest, who often visits the family. Gordon's father regularly yells at Father B. for his "unorthodox" views on Church doctrine, then falls to his knees and asks Father B. for his blessing. This ritual fills Gordon with alarm. "I knew everything this was supposed to mean: that it didn't matter that my father had insulted Father B. as a man; the office of the priesthood was infinitely respectable and humbling... I didn't believe in the possibility of this division of identity—the object of scorn, the sacred vessel; the persecutor, the humble penitent—although it was part of my faith to do so." She concludes, "In resisting this tableau I knew that I transgressed, but I felt I was right, and my sense of rightness was the first window letting in a disturbing light that fell straight onto the white stone of ancient practice." Since this was the first hint of Gordon's lasting relationship with her childhood faith, I wanted to understand exactly what she was talking about: what Catholic doctrine decrees such a dual identity? How, exactly, has her opinion of this doctrine changed over the years? What would this mean to her relationship to her faith, the tenets of which were so inseparable from her upbringing? "White stone of ancient practice" is a beautiful metaphor, but its power is aesthetic rather than truly descriptive of a moment that I, as a non-Catholic, wanted to understand.

In "The Architecture of a Life with Priests," Gordon recalls the priests she knew as a child, and in so doing contemplates the border between the sacred and the ordinary. Gordon's devout parents were introduced by a priest and, growing up, the Church functioned as a sort of extended family. "There was a way in which the sacred spaces that we lived by were transportable, or portable, and that is because every place a priest visited, every place he stopped or stayed, became, by that virtue, and for those hours, sacred." Gordon accompanied her mother (who was something of a priest groupie) when she drove Father B. to visit with his aged mother in a depressing New Jersey apartment. "Father B. would clear space on the dresser and say Mass. ... After the ritual moment, the apartment became its ordinary cavernous self; the light of the sacrament went out, and it was only a place inhabited by an old lady, with the unfresh smell of overworn taffeta and perfume with a used floral scent." Although Gordon develops a more complicated, personalized relationship with Catholicism, she cannot give up her faith in a priest's ability to transform ordinary places into sacred places. The implications are too disorienting. "If a priest was a man, like any other... he was emptied of potential to transform the places where he'd rest, impermanently, his anointed head. And these transformations were the only ones I could

imagine myself a part of. So I, too, would be deprived of transformation."

It occurs to me that I've focused on Gordon's childhood essays here, which points me toward a paradox in her writing: as the essays approach the presumably more lucid present in Gordon's life, the writing is in fact less emotionally vivid, less inhabited. The beauty of her sentences, the acuity of her observations, feel as if they are being offered in place of the searching emotional curiosity of the earlier memories. The lovely and masterful writing begins to seem like a reliquary whose contents are being safe-guarded, much like the regal New York City institutional architecture she writes about so admiringly. In the final pages of the book, she tells us, "The great buildings I staked my dreams on are no longer marked for me by their emptiness. I use them; they are places where I work. I no longer walk silent, awestruck in the New York Public Library; it is a place I do research. I look at paintings in the Metropolitan Museum mostly for the refreshment of my soul, but sometimes to write about them. And some days, when I am on the East Side and I want a place to write for an hour or so, I sit at the tables in the European sculpture wing, turn my back on a Rodin, sip a cappuccino, and look out the large windows at the park. ... I need these great buildings, what they provide, what they suggest, for my work."

But here's the thing: it's hard to imagine a public building having a private life. Like institutional architecture, which can deflect private revelation and intimidate us in the silence of its unimpeachable existence, the final essays in this book frustrate me. I feel that I've lost connection with the complex emotional terrain of Gordon's life. Even basic, orienting, biographical details become sketchy and when they come, they come at strange points. I spent much of "Boulevards of the Imagination" thinking that Gordon was divorced (though she talks about her family, she never mentions her husband), only to find Gordon, at the very end, referring to herself as "married." Perhaps Gordon was leery of impinging on her family's privacy? Or perhaps the distant past acquires a romantic glow that inspires imagination, an inspiration that didn't transfer to her adult life? *Seeing Through Places* ends with Gordon looking with wonder at her life—at *where* she is now—and saying with pride and gratitude, "I am here." But where is here, precisely? I want to share in Gordon's victory but I'm not familiar enough with the battles of her adult life to do that. In the end though, this criticism does little to diminish the power of the book. The striking, potent, and original meditations on the relationship between the self and its environment give *Seeing Through Places* a rare power—the power to sanctify memory through metaphor, and the self through language.

—SARI WILSON

Sari Wilson was a 1999-2000 writing fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center and is a former Stegner Fellow at Stanford. Her fiction has appeared in New York Stories and Maxine: A Magazine for Churlish Girls and Rakish Women. She is from Brooklyn.

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Six Figures

by Fred G. Leebron

Knopf

No one worries the way Warner Lutz worries. Warner has more anxiety before breakfast than most of us have in a whole week, and he doesn't even trade stocks or build software. Actually he works in non-profits. In the South. Lutz worries about the kids, his wife, his job, money, and house-hunting. He has desires (for quieter kids, a less controlling wife, autonomy at work, more money, a bigger house), and then worries about his desires. Although he wants his presidential vote to mean something, when he accidentally hits the wrong lever in the voting booth, he continues to vote the wrong ticket rather than linger and risk an upset with the baby, drooling onto his neck. More anxiety awaits: even if he could always put his son first, Warner suspects that he will unintentionally damage the child, as though injuring others were an inborn knack.

With Warner this does seem to be a distinct possibility. As the main character in Fred G. Leebron's second novel, Warner can't win for trying, although it's unclear to everyone, including Warner, just how much effort he's putting into the project. Half frothing bull, half curled-up leafy chrysalis, Warner drinks a mug of vodka in the morning then crawls under his son's crib for relief. What has happened to his marriage? Why do others get the rewards he doesn't—hasn't he given his life to service? Warner's intelligent, if petulant, perspective on the upper middle-class (okay, the rich snobs) of North Carolina is familiar—aren't his desires ours? Aren't his anxieties ours, too? Warner is just less capable of smoothing out the unsightly edges.

Six Figures, divided into six sections, like life into categories, and labeled "Mornings," "Work," "January," "Exposure," "Home," and "Aftermath," quickly overflows this ironically neat partitioning. Seeing how Warner can't figure out how to cap his anxiety so as to end it, life—which always knows the worst or the very thing you need—steps in and doles out an act of horrible violence that threatens to destroy Warner and his family. The novel, which to this early point progresses like a chronicle of unfulfilled middle-class American life at the end of the 20th century, now rapidly alters, becoming a suspense novel with the nervous edge of a whodunit. "January," the longest and central section, comes at you like a missile, although the actual crisis passes quickly and what grips us is all fallout. Leebron's story, after all, is the antithesis of a real whodunit; the supposed assailant is instantly identified by the descending new god of the house, Warner's mother-in-law, whose accusations seep like a contagion from her to the police and to nearly everyone else involved.

But Leebron doesn't want us to quite believe what they believe; the accusation is too bitterly motivated, the accused not quite convincing as such. This tension between apparent guilt and actual culpability is masterfully designed and executed. As a strategy it suggests that the pursuit of a single person to blame for all our woe is irrelevant. Yet the naming of a culprit, the goal foremost in almost every character's mind, allows the story to proceed with what has always been, we discover, the real issue: perhaps we can never truly know anyone, and if this is found to be so, must our lives shut down? Leebron takes up this question with ferocious concern. Is the life we pursue only a phantom, unattainable, and the people never who we thought they were or wanted them to be? Perhaps dispensing with our desires can show us what has been there all along as an antidote—loyalty, and unexpected repositories of familial love.

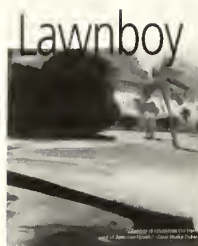
Leebron's novel is deft and unpredictable in its negotiations of the ambiguous boundaries between people and in its portrait of our frustrated ability to experience the same reality as those around us. His characters are extraordinarily palpable, even the two young children. The baby's personality is impressively inked with a Rorschach of his parents' ability to show affection, to injure, and to betray. Leebron traverses the days and the perspectives of his characters with ease and purpose, roving from Warner to his wife, Megan, to their parents and back again, navigating adeptly between various states of consciousness and emotional readiness. The prose, at first seemingly so smooth as to slip you along like a puck on ice, soon reveals its acrobatic abilities, bending syntax into the dreamy unreality of an emerging coma state:

She sank deep into the pillow and let the children control the bed. Soon she heard the television click on, but she couldn't lift her eyes. She couldn't see. Her head felt heavy, pointed, and she knew she should call the nurse, but Daniel had the control and she couldn't seem to reach it. Just reach it, she thought. Just lift your hand. It weighed too much, attached to her wrist like that, anchored to her arm, her shoulder glued in its socket. Just move. Oh god, she was tired. ... It wouldn't be good to drift off like this, with the children here. Her mother would disconnect the phone. She'd be disconnected. She was disconnected.

I missed a more concentrated foray into the depth of Warner's crisis—the five solitary days he must spend in the knowledge of everything he may have lost, which ultimately substantiates his emergence from the man he was. Leebron's command of his story is otherwise complete, and if the novel's resolution edges toward tidiness, we must remind ourselves that, after all, abject tragedy is not the only mode life knows how to play, and real resolution arises out of complex materials worked to their fullest. This is certainly the case with *Six Figures*.

—SHEILA P. DONOHUE

Sheila P. Donohue teaches in the English Department at Northwestern University. Her work has been published in numerous literary magazines, including The Threepenny Review and TriQuarterly.



Lawnboy

by Paul Lisicky
Turtle Point Press

Adolescent angst is a staple of the *bildungsroman*, where bouts of desperation and despair are as chronic as acne, and the pendulum swing between naïveté and cynicism as erratic as a teenager's hormones. Paul Lisicky's debut novel, *Lawnboy*, pushes beyond the usual tensions of the coming-of-age genre with distinctly fresh subject matter, and a defiantly honest narrator.

Evan Sarshik, on the cusp of adulthood, feels grievously misunderstood, confused by his awakening homosexuality, and plagued by his longing to leave the nest of his parents' home. Family life accounts for a good part of Evan's angst. His parents, Sid and Ursula, often go for days without speaking to one another. Peter, Evan's older and only brother, has run away from home. Evan himself is isolated and bitter, trying to be the good son while yearning for a life beyond his parents' circumscribed plans. Fixed in their "silences and resentments," Sid and Ursula, Evan tells us, "never dealt with anything. The same way they couldn't deal with me. I mean, I didn't mince or prance. I didn't weave, I didn't dot my 'i's' with circles or curlicues, but my eminent faggotry should have been obvious to them. Hello, Ursula. Hello, Sid. Knock, knock. Anybody home?"

Still in high school, Evan attempts to avoid ridicule, mastering a bouncy-kneed "guy walk." His only close friend is a straight girl named Jane. He desperately wants to connect with a man, preferably a lover. When his middle-aged neighbor, William, comes by to ask if he'd like a lawn mowing job, a spark of sexual tension flares, and Evan sets his sights on sleeping with the man.

Though he is basically sweet and naïve, there is a distinctly bad boy side to Evan, and it is much to Lisicky's credit that he avoids lavishing his protagonist with idealized authorial affection. Instead he reveals a fully dimensional character, depicting both Evan's charm and his less appealing, even repulsive, traits. While in bed with William, his thoughts range from tender musings about the older man's freckled back to a violent desire to attack him in his sleep. Later in the novel, he betrays his bisexual brother by arranging for Peter's boyfriend to find him in bed with a woman. Most often, though, Evan manages to surprise and amuse the reader while also winning our sympathy, as when, at age seventeen, he receives a dose of corporal punishment from his father: "He didn't punch me; he didn't do what any regular father would do. Instead he drew me to him, somehow rolled me over his knee like a puppet, and—get this—started spanking my clothed butt for a good half-minute or so. It was such a comic thing that I let him do it until we both filled up with shame. 'Happy, buddy boy?' I said."

Evan attempts, for a time, to be the son his parents want him to be. He stops seeing William, excels at school, helps out around the house. But he

cannot sustain the role. Eventually he packs his suitcase and runs away from home—down the street to William's. In time he concludes that their relationship is nearly as superficial as that with his parents, and once again he packs a bag and runs away—this time heading south to find his brother.

The trek serves as a metaphor for Evan's identity search, and underscores one of the book's central themes—the desire for connection. In spite of a series of separations and painful losses, Evan can't deny his need to meet someone, to share himself, to please and be pleased. It becomes a driving force that shapes him according to the expectations of his man-of-the-hour.

When his brother takes him in and hires him to work at the run-down hotel he's purchased, Peter's boyfriend, Hector, becomes one of Evan's closest confidants. There are no longer the confines of the closet to contend with, but Evan is awkwardly shy about seeking a community, his reluctance intensified by Hector's stories of the scores of friends he's lost to AIDS.

It's here that Lisicky does an especially fine job of portraying the dread and resignation so prevalent in the shadow of the current pandemic. In his attentiveness to the complexities of being a gay male in late 20th-century America, he focuses a sharp eye for details on the havens of safe sex, from the "wadded tissues on the floor" and the "fruity metallic smell" of the adult bookstore arcades, to a so-called "J-O party ... a great room, perhaps forty feet long, its concrete floor covered with a plastic tarp, on which a hundred men of all ages, races, and levels of attractiveness were clumped in threes and fours, standing in their perfect underwear and Doc Martens, leaning into each other, jerking off." His accumulation of unflinching observations finally makes *Lawnboy* not just a compelling story, but a documentary page from our time.

The spectre of AIDS also haunts Evan as he tries to define what has been holding him back for so long. "I'd never believed in the possibility of my own future ... my lack of faith had infused all my decisions, a low-grade fear and rage burning at the heart of everything, from why I'd stopped going to the dentist to my lack of organization to my hasty decisions about college, money, boyfriends." This recognition resonates as an epiphany for the reader, but Evan is slower to realize how his failure to connect with others is a result of his own willful detachment. It is not until after he's fled his brother's home that he begins to see how true connection requires more than mere physical attraction.

Lawnboy ends on an upbeat note. Though there lingers the suggestion that nothing is permanent, that love and happiness are serendipitous accidents and often fleeting, Evan has discovered an antidote to the pain of loss. Ultimately this is a story about hope, and the endless possibilities of the future.

—DOROTHY ANTCAK

Dorothy Antczak is a fiction writer and freelance journalist who lives in Provincetown. In her spare time she waits tables, manages the gallery at the Fine Arts Work Center and tends Stanley Kunitz's garden.

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"...and a Little Art Gallery"

Some Ether

by Nick Flynn

Graywolf Press

SOME ETHER



Maybe we all have the same inner life, just in different proportions. That's why folktales and fairytales, not to mention the Oedipus story and Sappho's poems, speak to us in universal ways. Midas turned his honey into money, and we get that. Icarus forgot the sunblock and paid for it. I have never had wings or put my eyes out, but I know what it is to be sunburned and blind.

Nick Flynn's first collection of poems, *Some Ether*, circulates around a terrible story, the suicide of the poet's mother, and the long destructive reverberation of that act inside the psyche of the speaker. In that sense it is as sensational and riveting, as recognizable, as any memoir in this era of memoirs. Call it confessional poetry, if you like. Or "a survivor's story." It is all of those things, but it is also poetry, and what good poetry can do is make a spiderweb shake as softly as a breath, bring the dead fly back to life, and follow the threads of that spiderweb into the distance of its unforeseeable attachments. These poems tell a drastic story, but they tell it with such delicacy and insight that it resonates in the inner life of anyone who has received serious damage—and who hasn't?

The epigraph that opens *Some Ether*, a quote from the British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, is too good not to repeat: "It is joy to be hidden, but disaster not to be found"—a pretty mythic tale itself. In his best poems, Nick Flynn speaks the vernacular of the unconscious, which both hides and finds beautifully. The poems demonstrate that, even in woundedness, some kind of wit is possible, as in "Other Meaning": "Coming home from the drive-in, asleep under/blankets in the vast backseat//my mother full of attention to the road//I remember a chair, a maroon & velvet throne, I fell asleep in it once//under a glacier of coats/as a party raged around me. Only later did I learn//the other meaning of maroon—//of sailors, whole families, put out to sea/in inadequate lifeboats, left to drink their own piss//& pull gulls from the sky."

From throned king to castaway, isn't that the journey of the male child? Deposed, abandoned, and distressed, the profound wound of desertion is the center of this book, and the poems are full of such brilliant images of connection and separation—in one poem the child speaks to the mother through a long cardboard tube; in another, the speaker addresses the ghost of the mother in an image that precisely figures the bond between the dead and the living, which is also a kind of bondage: "You without a body without a compass without oars/your hands are useless in this world, resting on my shoulders//trying to steer."

The powerful, grief-stricken stories in *Some Ether* are richly dramatic and moving in themselves. One powerful poem depicts the mother contemplating

her gun; another retells the flashbacks of a Viet Nam vet boyfriend. But because Flynn is so psychologically canny, the dominant concern of these poems evolves as you read it; becomes not the dreadful fact of the mother's suicide, but the question of whether or not the speaker can stop replaying the tragedy. The dilemma is familiar and terrible: how a loyalty to the past can mean never fully belonging to the present. Images of paralysis, detachment, and invisibility appear throughout the book, as in "The Robot Moves": "As a kid/I made up a game/where I would turn into a robot,/cruel & lifeless, & it wouldn't matter/if you were my best friend, I'd turn on you/... no matter how much you'd plead,/I don't want to play this game, because/something inside had turned, something/essential, that couldn't be repaired/with words."

Or, conversely, images of being overwhelmed, as in this rich passage from the poem "Flood": "Yesterday/the river broke its banks/& flooded the cemetery, washing away//topsoil, collapsing tombstones. It lifted//the caskets from their graves,/left someone's mother in a tree, delivered a stillborn//to the wrong family. Ten strangers/floated into the parking lot & lined their caskets up/as though anxious for the ruined market/to open."

Here, as in the poet's psyche, the dead are still getting around town, and the water, of course, is the uncontrollable unconscious. Flynn's great strength is such intuitive, figurative richness. In one of her tart essays, "The Forbidden," the poet Louise Glück attacks a certain contemporary poetic genre—poetry that enacts what she calls the "fairy tale" of therapy. Such poems, she says, present the victims as heroes, and imply that simply by the act of telling, the teller will be healed, cured, and freed. Experience says otherwise. One of the integrities of Flynn's book is that it doesn't make any such promise. There is no clear indication that the speaker's damage can be triumphed over—no promise that any of us recover from anything. In fact, in *Some Ether* there is more than one refutation of the confessional mode: "You know the way Jesus//rips open his shirt/to show us his heart, all flaming and thorny,/the way he points to it/... My version of hell/is someone ripping open his shirt & saying, look what I did for you."

There is a nakedness, elegance, and emotional intelligence everywhere in this fine collection. The poems are beautifully clear in their particulars and meanings. The title *Some Ether* sounds like a request for anesthetic, but it is in fact an eloquent exhibition of the sleeper stubbornly trying to wake up. Suffering is where consciousness comes from. Maybe some wounds never entirely heal, but, transformed, they can become an aperture through which light shines on what we are. Which makes it possible to limp into the new world, one step at a time.

—TONY HOAGLAND

Tony Hoagland is a former fellow of the Fine Arts Work Center whose most recent book of poems is *Donkey Gospel*, published by Graywolf Press.



The Kingdom of the Subjunctive

by Suzanne Wise

Alice James Books

From its title onward, Suzanne Wise's first collection of poems has an invigoratingly self-assured, empowered, almost cavalier tone. Divided into five sections, these taut narrative poems are excursions within the lyric tradition. Playful and energetic, they toy with form just when they seem to be getting comfortable with it. There is the mock-confessional poem, "Confession," which is actually overtly confessional, the sort of imagism-once-removed of "A Girl's Life," and the ubiquitous couplet utilized throughout, sometimes end-stopped, sometimes enjambed, but never rhyming. It is Wise's discursive meditative line, à la Wallace Stevens, coupled with her meticulous attention to the musicality of that line, that make her poems resonate with lilting cadences. Neither the opaque materiality of language nor its potential for transparency seem to be Wise's concern here; she deploys the words that best state her case, but pointedly and in a way that sounds "right." There is an inevitability that gives the poems a sophisticated resoluteness. It *had* to be said this way.

And sound right they do. "Highway to English" begins with a melodic repetition of vowel sounds so breathtaking it ought to be set to music. The gnashing together of sounds at each line's end both familiarizes and defamiliarizes what may or may not be the poet's native tongue:

No one would come this way for consolation.
It is a finished and unfinished excursion.

The stone horses are still drowning in the fountain.
The stuffed horses are still prancing at the ramparts.

Everything roadside pretends it is accidental.
Everything that has survived is in rehearsal.

The fullness of the repeated sounds—consolation/excursion, finished/unfinished, drowning/fountain, prancing/ramparts, accidental/rehearsal—gives the reader a sense of being stuffed with meaning, both informed and confounded. The highway figures both metaphorically and metonymically in this poem, standing in for the journey to meaning that is at once arduous and straight-ahead. The loaded notion of a "native tongue" becomes central as more and more poems deal with the problem of translation, frustrated silences, and unintelligibility.

While language as physical matter presents itself in varying degrees of materiality, language as means of communication is problematized throughout the book. German plays a central part in this problematic; perhaps the poet is of German descent but speaks only a bit of the language herself. In any case, the irreconcilability of German and English (and by implication, of any

two languages), and the arbitrary nature of the isolated word, are palpable. The very question of a "native" language becomes suspect; is the task to learn German, or to unlearn English? To unlearn German? The opacity of a "foreign" language, be it native or new, is foregrounded. We are confronted with a wall of sound, as in "Was heisst Rechtfertigung? Bewältigung der Vergangenheit," a sort of phonetic "translation," and in "Nicht" where, to begin with, we are bombarded by a litany of negative constructions ("nicht," "nicht wahr," "noch nicht," "nicht mehr," etcetera) before witnessing the meeting of nicht and night.

History, to be sure, is insidiously entangled in this web of language, and inevitably drags identity along with it. In "Signing Up," a girlie pen featuring a woman stripped when the pen is in use, enacts a violation visited upon the subjectivity it helps to write, "leaking signatures across the declaration of war." The girl herself wears a "swimsuit of ink," a businessman "loses himself in the draining out," and so on. We are continually written into and out of history, and our only weapons are the very words that inflicted our wounds. Writing our own histories becomes essential, and there are glimpses of "autobiography" throughout this book. We come away with a proliferation of parts—"I am all tiny bits;" "I am a king's;" "I drive a hard bargain, selling/myself short, demanding less and less;" "I was very prolific in my generating qualities;" "I lived for love. I erred accordingly;" "I was misunderstood"—but "she would rather not be a complete sentence, completely sentenced."

It is perhaps the unwillingness to be "sentenced" that gives way to equivocation, or oblique reference. Everywhere in these poems there is the sense of hesitation, starting over, silence, and apology, but also of indictment and transgression. As Wise states it, "I have learned that my gender is still a risky situation," and one that often comes to blows. The poet takes refuge in vernacular and idiosyncrasy, and Suzanne Wise has found an idiom that fits her, if a bit uncomfortably at times. Her work reflects a willfulness and a perseverance that are ultimately the best revenge.

—ELIZABETH FODASKI

Elizabeth Fodaski is the author of *fracas* (Krupskaya, 1999). She lives and teaches in New York City.

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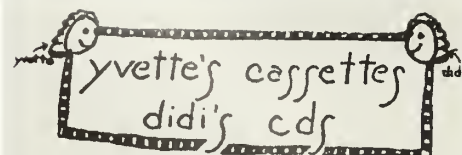
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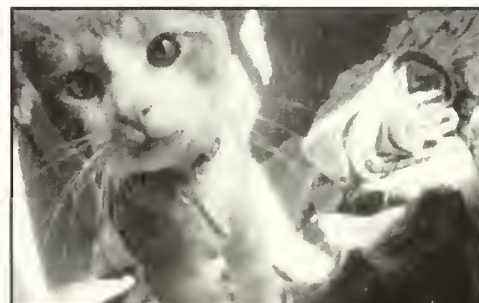
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J. M. Coetzee

Disgrace

by J. M. Coetzee

Viking

Works as diverse as *The Invisible Man*, *Black Like Me*, *Notes of a Native Son*, *Mississippi Burning*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *American History X*, *Colors*, *Master Harold and the Boys*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Huckleberry Finn*, the films of Spike Lee, and the music of Public Enemy have addressed the seething ideological, political, and psychological conflicts between black and white people. These works have, both subtly and bluntly, suggested that intelligent audiences respond to this situation—either in a local or a global way. It is a different accomplishment entirely to take a scenario, fictional or otherwise, in which skin color has caused great rifts between individuals and whole sectors of society, and elevate the scenario to unexpected heights by plumbing its philosophical depths. Such examination raises, but does not answer, exceedingly thorny questions about culpability, guilt, social erosion, necessity, and survival. The most likely response to these questions is self-examination, which may lead to the revelation that we can change the world, or at least our own outlook, with courage and self-extension. J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, a remarkable and moving story of life in contemporary South Africa and winner of the 1999 Booker Prize, demands just such a discovery.

In the first half of the novel, David, a divorced professor of communications at Cape Technical College in Cape Town, has an affair with a young student in a rush of uncontrollable middle-aged sexual desperation. When called before an examining board of his peers, he displays little guilt. The board rules to dismiss him. The novel's second phase begins when the humiliated professor flees to his daughter Lucy's farm in the country to gather his wits. Soon after his arrival, a group of black youths rapes Lucy, assaults David, and burglarizes the farm. Because the teenage boys are members of the largely black community in which Lucy lives, Lucy risks further harm to herself and her father if she seeks legal protection. David eventually returns to Cape Town, unable to help his daughter find a way through her entropic life. There he finds that his apartment has been ransacked, and that another professor has taken his office at the college. He returns to the country—seeking an “utter stillness which he would wish prolonged forever”—accepting the simple, unintellectual life there as the lesser of two evils. Soon after his return, however, he is shocked to learn that Lucy was impregnated during the rape; her inner turmoil over whether or not to keep the child wrenches her father as well.

Noticeable immediately in this novel is a crisp, brisk, almost journalistic tone that contrasts with the meditative texture of Coetzee's earlier books, and contributes to an evenhanded recounting of plot events, as if the author himself were not arbiting

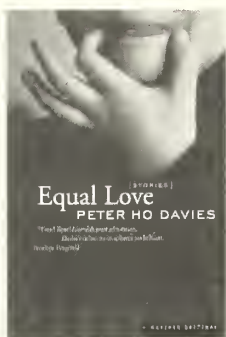
right or wrong, but merely telling a story. This style also brings the urgency of his subject home to readers. Coetzee focuses here on telling a good story, though readers of *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *The Heart of the Country* know that he has always written proficient moral and spiritual thrillers. The transition between the book's two narrative halves, for instance, is surprising and shrewd. Both parts of the book contain a misdeed at their center, and yet in neither case can readers clearly identify a culprit. To many, tampering with the mind of a woman at a highly impressionable age, and refusing to admit to the seriousness of such actions, would be detestable. And yet David's “victim” is portrayed as a flirt who pays her professor a great deal of attention. Coetzee places judgment in readers' hands. The professor's retreat into the country might seem the first step of a slow, pathetic slide into anonymity from a position of respect. Oddly enough, when he undergoes physical and psychological humiliation, we pity him, as we might pity Job. His city crimes, scandalous in the cloistered world of the academy, become piddling by comparison with the acts of his attackers. Or do they? The boys' attack on David and Lucy could be read as an act of racial vengeance, spurred by years of oppression. If this is the case, should David and Lucy pay the price on behalf of all white people? Whose side do we take?

Disgrace weakens in the rare moments when it appears, in spite of itself, to take a side. In one scene, David's college-age lover's churlish, tough boyfriend confronts the professor in his office. The moment almost resembles pure fantasy, a showdown between two romantic rivals in which the cuckolded boyfriend, unlikeable as he may be, clearly has the moral upper hand. In another scene, David sees his daughter's main attacker at a party in the town where they live and can do nothing to them, buffered as he is by his community. The boy need only ask a simple question—“Who are you?”—to make David feel like “the stranger, the odd one out.” The scene is frightening, almost timeless, but again smacks of card-stacking—which has no place in a novel as high-minded as this one. We suddenly want David to seize the moment, avenge the injustice—or do we? The history of apartheid and the greater injustices it has justified forbid easy answers.

Coetzee has written a novel in which crucial events have a profound moral doubleness. None of the dilemmas at this novel's heart are exactly what they seem, and the conclusion rends us, in its own quiet way. Ascending from an academic scandal to a sociopolitical catastrophe, *Disgrace* hinges on the symbiotics of emotion and social structure, and is well-served by Coetzee's keen, panoramic vision. Coetzee rouses our compassion with a tale that tests our spiritual endurance as it stretches our capacity for moral consideration.

—MAX WINTER

Max Winter's poems have appeared in *Paris Review*, *The New Republic*, *Boulevard*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Volt*, and elsewhere. He is Associate Editor of *Fence*.



Equal Love

by Peter Ho Davies

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In *Equal Love*, Peter Ho Davies' shimmering and heartfelt second collection of fiction, characters struggle with issues of balance, trust, fear, and class as they move in the worlds of parenthood, romance, family, and work. Even more graceful and humane than Davies' stunning first collection, *The Ugliest House in the World*, these new stories recall Joyce's *Dubliners*; they follow trajectories of personal and public responsibility, while at the same time retaining and expanding the farflung inventiveness that has marked Davies as one of today's most distinctive short story writers.

In the opening story, "The Hull Case," Davies artfully portrays the dilemma of a childless interracial family in 1950s America as they struggle to testify about their disparate recollections regarding the apparent visitation of an alien spaceship. A sense of overwhelming fear permeates this tale, as the black husband, Henry, feels both his sense of reality and his actual reality slipping away. "He was afraid of losing her, he knew, though the admission, so abject and ineffectual, shamed him. But behind that fear was another—a dim, formless dread of his own children and what they might mean for the precarious balance of his marriage, which made him shudder." The central irony of this complicated vision is that while the white wife, Helen, does not always believe Henry's perceptions of the racial tensions he faces in their everyday life, she is further distanced from him because of his failure to believe in her perceptions of the supposed alien encounter.

Definitions of bravery further feature in the appropriately named "Brave Girl," a slyly funny tale about a ten-year-old girl and her hapless father, a dentist who takes his daughter to work every day during the last summer that they will ever spend together. The mother has deserted with a captain from the Territorial Army, "a gynecologist in real life" the brave girl explains, "and on Sunday I would go away to live with my mother and Captain Cunt." The father, while cowardly, is also charitable, and teaches her about the delicate balance between love and fear. "I told him I knew he loved me," she tells us. "And I did. But I also knew I was the only one left for him to love, and ... it made me worry that I didn't love him enough. I didn't want to choose. I already felt sorry for him because my mother had left. I tried to make up for it by being good." About her mother, she says, "I loved her too, of course, but next to fear, love just didn't seem like a useful way of choosing between your parents."

"The Next Life" features Lim, a Chinese-American son coming to terms with both his father's death and the art of mourning. "Even as a grown man, he found, he was afraid of his father ... Perhaps he had loved his father, he told himself. Next to respect and obedience, love had always been an extravagance in their relationship." To offset this element of their lost bond, Lim pays for an extravagant funeral, replete with sacrificial offerings and professional mourners, only to win back the cost of it in an all-night poker game with the mourners he has hired. The grace and good humor of the narration make this enjoyably convoluted plot function on another level entirely as it explores issues of pride and heritage.

Throughout, the balance between loving your mate and loving your children is underscored with economy, precision, and intelligence. In "Small World," a married woman asks her old boyfriend (who himself is an expectant husband), "If you don't want to turn into your parents, don't have kids, right?" And later, after they've both betrayed their respective spouses by having sex with each other, she tells him, "You know, you don't have to compare everything. Your wife, me, our parents. Not everything's comparable." The mother of three children, she brings the full weight to bear on their too brief encounter, "Some people fight more when they have kids. You know why? Because they can."

On a different tonal note, the breathless "How to Be an Expatriate" hilariously and swiftly captures what it is like to be caught between the rock of your old culture and the hard place of your new culture, while struggling to make ends meet in the arenas of work, love, and familial duty. "Cheat on your wife," the second-person voice both advises and recounts. "She tells you one night you are losing your accent and it makes you feel like you're losing your hair."

Throughout this dazzling collection, Davies' characters are not necessarily looking for equal love so much as they are looking for balance. Take, for instance, the bittersweet ending of "Cakes of Baby," about a young interracial couple's barely endurable Thanksgiving with part of their extended family: "At home, in bed, they read silently before sleep. It has rained on the way back, pattering through the leaves, and now water drips off the gutters above them, the windowsill, the tree outside, the drips coming in odd, uneven rhythms like a host of slightly unsynchronized clocks." Later, "outside, the dripping has slowed to a single, slow beat." Most of Davies' characters find this single beat, this moment of balance, eventually, in one form or another, but not before they—and the reader—have been through something unsettling and extraordinary.

—FRED G. LEEBRON

Fred G. Leebron's novels are Six Figures (reviewed elsewhere in this issue) and Out West. He has new fiction in DoubleTake and TriQuarterly. He is an associate professor of English at Gettysburg College.

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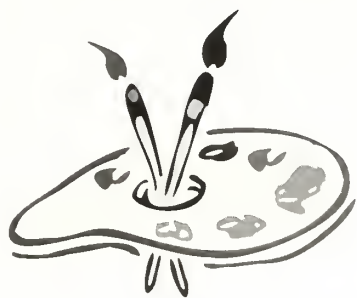
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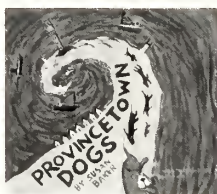
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Provincetown Dogs

by Susan Baker

University Press of New England

Provincetown Dogs reminds us that Provincetown is very much a dog town. Baker's *The History of Provincetown*, published last year by Verve, chronicled notable moments in human history. This book takes up where that left off, with a nostalgic look at famous dogs who roamed Provincetown's streets, outwitting dog catchers and townspeople alike, before the days of mandatory spaying, leash laws, and pooper scooper etiquette. Town drunks, fishing vessels, empty beaches, and puddled streets provide colorful company, locales, and landscapes. In fourteen beautifully painted dog portraits, Baker captures a Provincetown that now exists only in memory, though it is hinted at on rainy gray winter days.

Baker is well-known for her dog paintings and dog sculptures. She published a shorter, black-and-white version of *Provincetown Dogs* fifteen years ago. An unabashed dog lover, Baker wrote that book while pregnant with her son, Ellery, so he would get to know and love her favorite dogs.

Baker's long association with dogs rivals that of James Thurber, and she is among the only humorists in decades to successfully portray the dog as a species equal to the human in every respect. Baker uses her sharp understanding of psychology to show that sometimes the line between dog ego and human ego is fuzzy (or should I say hairy?). Baker's dogs have recognizable human frailties—the accommodating Doggette “always tried to do what people wanted her to do without being asked,” and Zoomer “had many friends despite herself.”

Many of the dogs Baker writes about have taken on mythic status in town. Johnny Lo-down was “built so low to the ground he could hide under cars when the dogcatcher chased him.” This ingenuity is remembered so fondly and well that at a Town Meeting nearly fifteen years after Johnny Low-down's death, a candidate for selectman took the floor and spoke passionately about the dog in an effort to garner votes.

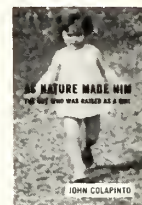
In both *Provincetown Dogs* and *The History of Provincetown*, Baker lovingly collects oddball characters—many of them long-gone—the way others collect rare antiques. But Baker skips the refinishing, preferring instead to keep the patina of age, imperfection, and authenticity intact. In other words, Baker, with disarming wit, stakes her claim to the real Provincetown, the old Provincetown, and helps us remember it was the spectacular nobodies who gave the town its soul.

—MARGARET CARROLL-BERGMAN

Margaret Carroll-Bergman wrote about the artist
Cynthia Packard in last year's Provincetown Arts.

As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl

by John Colapinto
HarperCollins



Chick for a Day: What Would You Do If You Were One?

Edited by Fiona Giles
Simon & Schuster



Along with death and taxes, we can count on the fact that every year more ink will be spilled trying to answer that eternal riddle: what makes men and women different? Two books published this year suggest, in very different ways, the dangers of assuming that gender resides in the genitalia. John Colapinto's *As Nature Made Him* presents a moving account of the ill-fated effort to raise Bruce Reimer as a girl after a botched circumcision destroyed his penis. The anthology *Chick for a Day* besets upon us several dozen male writers' fantasies about having a vagina for twenty-four hours.

As Nature Made Him is the most detailed and intimate analysis to date of the celebrated “twins case,” as Reimer's gender reassignment has been known in the scientific literature; the Reimer family had remained anonymous until now. In 1966, Janet and Ron Reimer of Winnipeg scheduled circumcisions for their eight-month-old twins, Bruce and Brian, in an attempt to alleviate pain they were experiencing in urination. During the course of the procedure, the doctor essentially burned off Bruce's penis. Phallic reconstruction was not an option at that time, and specialists made dire predictions about Bruce's future. Wrote one, “He will be unable to consummate marriage or have normal heterosexual relations, in that he will have to recognize that he is incomplete, physically defective, and that he must live apart.”

This ominous prognosis led the Reimers to seek the counsel of Dr. John Money, a renowned psychologist who was then pioneering gender reassignment at Baltimore's John Hopkins Hospital. In what's come to be known as the nature vs. nurture debate, Money falls squarely and ardently in nurture's camp: his work with hermaphrodites, intersexes, and transvestites convinced him that newborns were “total psychosexual blank slates.” The charismatic and reassuring doctor convinced the Reimers that the solution lay in surgically castrating their baby and raising him as a girl. In Bruce, a male born with normal genitals who, as a bonus, had an identical twin brother, the doctor found a perfectly controlled experiment.

For years—due in no small part to Money's knack for self-promotion—the experiment was hailed as a success. Both social scientists and feminists celebrated the twins case for its “proving” that gender differences are cultural and environmental, not biological. According to Colapinto, however, while Money traveled from seminar to seminar describing the happy and well-adjusted twins, “Brenda” Reimer, indeed the entire Reimer family,

lived in misery. Brenda, extremely “tomboyish,” was uncomfortable in her own skin, aggressive and anxious, a pariah at school. Although she was unaware of the circumstances of her birth, traumatic annual visits to Money’s clinic and, later, estrogen therapy, signaled to her that something was not quite right. As a preteen, she flatly refused to submit to surgery to “fix” her genitals—the construction of her vagina—despite intense pressure from Dr. Money, the team of local doctors who treated her, and her conflicted and guilt-ridden parents. A couple of years later, with the encouragement of a kindly psychiatrist who had taken on Brenda’s case, the Reimers concluded that the experiment had failed. They revealed to their daughter that she had been born male, and, tellingly, Brenda immediately decided to live as a boy, naming herself David. For the next several years, David underwent a host of procedures, including a painful double mastectomy, testosterone therapy, and phalloplastic surgery. He survived a couple of suicide attempts and now works in a Winnipeg slaughterhouse. He lives with his wife and is a father to her three children from previous relationships.

Colapinto shapes the events of David’s life into a riveting and affecting narrative. He seems to have won the Reimers’ trust; formerly reserved family members speak frankly about the most painful episodes from the past. His well-researched account also includes interviews with former teachers and doctors and with two fellow outcasts who befriended Brenda during her school years. All of Colapinto’s material convincingly demonstrates that the attempt to turn Bruce into a girl was disastrous, and he lays the blame largely on Dr. Money, who is presented here as a hubristic monster. Money, for his part, stopped speaking publicly about the case upon hearing of Brenda’s decision to live as a boy. When asked about it, he’d claim to have lost track of the family. Others in the nurture camp also made inconspicuous retreats. Colapinto reports that references to the case were quietly removed from new editions of women’s studies textbooks. Brenda’s decision seemed to strike a damaging blow.

Yet Brenda’s misery as a girl shouldn’t be interpreted as de facto evidence that nature trumps nurture. While Colapinto doesn’t make this point specifically, nurture (or, more precisely, cultural meanings associated with gender) seems to have significantly affected the reactions of those who encountered Brenda. For instance, a guidance counselor who treated Brenda during first grade recalled —before Colapinto revealed to her that Brenda was born a male—that the child was pretty and well-dressed, but that “it was her manner more than anything else that got in the way. She was always grubby. She’d always just been fighting with the kids and playing in the dirt. Brenda was really a rough little kid. She didn’t want to sit down with a book. She’d rather play knock-’em-down-shoot-’em-up cop games.” When Brenda played with girls, the counselor recalls disapprovingly, she always tried “to be the boss.” Colapinto uses tales like this to create a portrait of Brenda as a girl unable to suppress her essential boyiness. But the counselor’s impressions arguably have as much to do with social mores as with biological sex. It’s one thing to look back on Brenda’s behavior and to read into it,

knowing that she was born male. In this case, however, the counselor was as troubled by Brenda as she’d presumably be by any girl who did not conform to cultural norms of girlhood: keeping clean, avoiding conflict, sitting quietly. And surely there are “normal” girls who reject these standards of behavior. Case in point: by sixth grade, Brenda began hanging out with a group of misfit tomboys. One of them, Heather, recalled to Colapinto that she “valued Brenda as a girl devoid of the duplicity and backstabbing that had poisoned so many of her relations with girls in the past.” Again, if duplicity and backstabbing are considered “feminine” characteristics, it is for cultural and not biological reasons.

Unfortunately, Colapinto doesn’t explicitly evaluate the nature vs. nurture debate, but his book, unsurprisingly, has been commended and criticized, respectively, by members of the two camps. Above all, the story of David Reimer warns against wholeheartedly embracing biology or environment without allowing for the complex ways that combinations of the two affect gender identity. It seems obviously wrong-headed to assume that a normal infant boy who has lost his penis is not still a boy; maleness should not be facily equated with the presence of a penis. At the same time, the vast range of characteristics and behaviors that are coded male should not be seen as the simple products of biology (especially given that women often exhibit “male” traits, and that considerations of masculine or feminine traits vary across cultures). David Reimer makes this point himself with his own explanation of manhood: “What makes you a man is you treat your wife well, you put a roof over your family’s head, you’re a good father. ... I guess John Money would consider my children’s biological fathers to be real men. But they didn’t stick around to take care of the children. I did. That, to me, is a man.” Evolutionary psychologists might suggest that real men, in fact, do not remain with their families, that their biological makeup compels them to spread their seed far and wide. Reimer’s definition attests to the power of cultural interpretations of gender.

Like *As Nature Made Him*, the anthology *Chick for a Day*, in which male writers imagine a day as a woman, ought to inspire compelling questions about gender. Regrettably, Fiona Giles’ interesting idea (the book is a successor to an earlier volume by women writers, *Dick for a Day*) yields mostly uninteresting and uneven writing. Many of the contributors, like the misguided doctors who treated Bruce Reimer in the 1960s, conflate gender with genitalia: they seem more interested in trying out their new vaginas than in giving serious consideration to actual or perceived differences between men and women. The most revolting example is Ronald Sukenick’s overlong and sordid tale of a young woman who has sex with everyone from her husband to a stranger to her father-in-law to, no kidding, a dog.

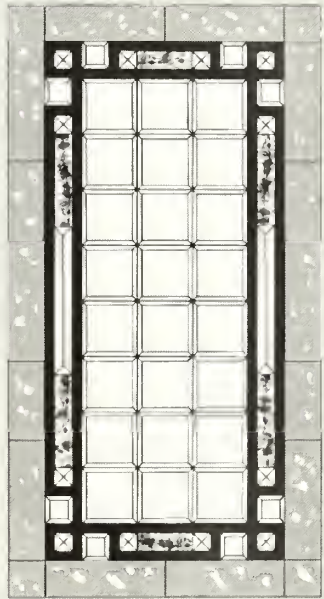
Some of the offerings are short and lazy, like *nerve.com* editor Rufus Griscom’s pronouncement that “any man who doesn’t fantasize about having a vagina is lacking ambition” and author Lawrence Chua’s observation that “everybody’s got a pussy. We just don’t all know how to make it purr.” Several simplistically romanticize such “female” qualities as compassion, empathy, and cleanliness without examining why these traits are gendered to begin

with. The best, and most original, entry comes from Sandip Roy. In his story, the gay narrator convinces his lover, Steve, to take a pill that temporarily transforms him into a woman so that he can avoid coming out to his parents when they visit from India. By the end of the tale, the parents have canceled their visit, and Steve has decided to continue taking the pill and live as a lesbian.

Giles concludes in her foreword that “becoming a woman brings out the best in a man.” That point is made more effectively by David Reimer, whose years as a girl sensitized him to cultural constraints imposed on females, than by any of the contributors to *Chick for a Day*. —BARBARA SPINDEL

Barbara Spindel is a writer working on her Ph.D. dissertation in American Studies. She lives in New York.

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Ryan Landry:

A Thinking Drag Man for the Thinking Drag Fan



RYAN LANDRY IS IN A PANIC.

His Provincetown landlady is auctioning off his summer rental to the highest telephone bidder. Landry is in Boston. When the price gets to \$9,000, he hangs up, hops in his car and drives the two hours to Provincetown to line up another apartment. It is February and the rentals are being grabbed faster than cigars in the Oval Office. One third-floor Commercial Street walk-up has a \$25,000 seasonal price tag. It looks as if the drag artist is locked out of the market. But within hours of arriving on the Cape, he secures a rental ... in North Truro. "A quaint fishing village, no more. All the freaks and artists and fishermen are

gone ... I'll come back to Provincetown when the dry wall crumbles," he says, speaking of course of the pricey condo market that is gobbling up lower-priced apartment units. Landry is a sharp business man who knows that if anything is ever going to happen, you have to get off your arse.

Landry's Dollhouse Theater—a circus minus live animal acts—runs on sheer human energy. A gifted entertainer, Landry started the Dollhouse six years ago with his savings of \$20,000. Come summertime, Landry and his band of merry transvestites, the Gold Dust Orphans, take the Dollhouse to Provincetown and treat audiences to his original and literate productions: *Dragula*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Rosemary's Baby: the Musical*, *Charlie's Angels* and *the Flaming Cave of the Tobacco Heiress*, *Johnny Guitar*, *Dynasty*, and *How Mrs. Grinchley Swiped Christmas*. Landry writes, acts in,

and produces his own plays and borrows from popular culture to sell seats. His comical titles, however, betray little of the social commentary that is the hallmark of a Dollhouse Production. "We are show people," says Landry. "We put on shows and entertain, and hopefully, we make people think."

Landry's show biz camp begs to prove that vaudeville is not dead; it's wearing a wig of a different color. Last fall, the Washington-based National Gay and Lesbian Task Force gave Landry its community service award for being a "vital force in American Gay Theater." Landry also appeared on a panel discussion for gay playwrights with Terrance McNally and Tony Kushner. While Landry's theater is undeniably queer and he jokes about having a "feminine" writer's voice, he steadfastly rejects the homogenization of gay culture, and rails especially against gays who live a suburban white-bread existence.

"Gay men are sheep," Landry pronounces, launching into a signature diatribe. "They would dance in a gas chamber if it had a good DJ. They could be led to slaughter and they wouldn't even know it. They are so saturated with their need for the rejection/acceptance game that gay life is about. They want to be accepted and they want to be rejected, and it will continue forever. Gay men have always wanted to emulate straight people. They just never knew they could and all of a sudden they think they can and all of a sudden they are the most boring people on earth. The gay people that I hang around with have to be super gay. I love them. The real Nellie freaks. There is a new kind of gay, the muscular, do-nothing gays. The untalented bourgeois crappy ass gays. I have no interest in them."

Landry's success, like his view on boring gay men, is not without controversy. Last summer during a panel discussion on theater, sponsored by the Provincetown Art Association and Museum as part of its "Forum 99" series, members of Provincetown's "legitimate" theater community complained that they were losing audiences to drag shows, which some seemed to see as a bastardization of the "real" American theater that began in Provincetown. "The more people who attend our shows, the more they [the 'legitimate' theater people] hate us," says Landry. "We are completely written off as a joke and yet we are no joke. When people think about theater in Provincetown they think of drag shows. Serious

"We put on shows and entertain, and hopefully, we make people think."

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theater is dying. There are theater companies in Boston who view themselves as legitimate and they don't get nearly as much press as the Dollhouse does. There is more to floating a theater than holding a martini glass and raising funds." Landry is doing something right, and he is doing it on a shoestring. There are no fancy fundraisers or gala balls with big name supporters, yet Landry pays his actors \$500 a run, a queen's ransom compared to what other nonequity companies pay their actors, and so far has broken even with the house filled to an average of ninety percent at \$15 a head. Without raising a glass, the Dollhouse is self-sustaining.

The 100-seat Dollhouse Theater has a permanent home in the basement of the Boston Arts Resource Center. Its brick walls and low-hanging heating pipes peel with lead paint chips and give off a low whistle during rehearsals for Landry's latest project, *The Bunny Trail*. The space also serves as a temporary prop room—upturned plastic cows, lions, and a headless deer look like a collection of lawn ornaments stolen from restaurants on Route 1 in Peabody. Everything is larger than life, from the giant brown bear propped up in the corner, to the stuffed red fox mounted on a birch branch atop several yards of "fun fur." As crappy as it looks, there are thousands and thousands of dollars worth of props in this room. "Granted, some of it is junk that I bought at joke shops," explains Landry, a large white rabbit head in his arms. The Dollhouse set designs are far from minimalist and highly stylized. Landry's set designer for *The Bunny Trail*, Scott Martino, has created a netherland between reality and fantasy with his painted cardboard sets where doors, windows, and bookcases open and shut to expose and hide an interior world. "I've seen sets in town that are made up of a ladder and a haystack. Where's the art in that?" asks Landry.

Landry does not appear in drag in *The Bunny Trail*, which depicts childhood as a mix between *Alice in Wonderland* and *Psycho*. "I guess I'm a bitter old queen," he laments when asked about the autobiographical underpinnings of the play. Abandoned at birth by his mother and alcoholic father, Landry and his siblings were farmed out to foster homes. "My mother said she was going to California to make this movie called *Bulwhip*," he says, referring to the 1958 classic B Western, "and, she never returned. She wasn't in the movie either." The cheesy *Bulwhip* inspired Landry to make *Johnny Guitar*. Eventually he and his brother were adopted by their paternal aunt and uncle, who Landry calls Mother and Father. Landry's parents have never seen him on stage, but his mother once saw a tape of him in the title role of Camille in the Charles Ludlum play. "I was proud," he laughs, "I don't know if she was proud." About twenty years ago, Landry had a chance meeting with the biological mother who left him on a doorstep. "God, I thought, I hope I don't look like her. She was homely."

Landry grew up in a trailer park in rural Connecticut. His adoptive family was Mormon and the trailer park provided a surreal setting for the gay youth. His father was a lumberjack. "I remember looking at the shotgun held across his legs

when I told him I was gay," says Landry. At seventeen, he left home, lived out of his car, and worked at the local plastics factory. His work in theater is an extension of not wanting to work in a factory or wait tables. Landry escaped to New York City a year later and became a prostitute by accident. "I went to this club called Cowboys and Cowgirls, half expecting to see Paul Lynde," he explains. Not only did he run into the famous comedian, but also Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams. Jim Byrnes, Landry's business partner and director for the Dollhouse, interjects and challenges Landry on not knowing what kind of bar he stumbled into. "I honestly did not know. Yes, I became a hustler, but mostly what these booze-soaked celebrities wanted was conversation. They were lonely and looking for companionship." Landry drops his voice to a conspiratorial whisper, "If they wanted sex, they could get it for free at the Y." (It occurs to me at this point that Landry, who is famous for his use of low humor and blue language, has not uttered one vulgarity.) Landry soon became addicted to heroin and the high life. However, over a five-year period, he supplanted heroin and alcohol with a degree in fine arts. "I wasn't lying in a burnt-out basement," sings Landry operatically. "There are harder addictions to break than heroin."

By all accounts, Landry's number one addiction is hard work. He started out in show business at the seedy east side dive, the Pyramid Club. Paid \$20 a night to jump through flaming hoops of fire, he wore a wig, then a tiara, and finally settled on a nun's habit. Soon he was discovered by Everett Quinton, the new artistic director of the Ridiculous Theater. Years earlier, Landry had known Ridiculous Theater founder Charles Ludlum, but he never traded in on that friendship for a job. Just as he was starting to make a name for himself in one of New York's most prestigious off-Broadway theaters, Landry quit the Ridiculous and followed his boyfriend (Brian Carmmody, a writer for *People* magazine) to Provincetown. It was 1989. Within one month, Landry's boyfriend left him, his dog died, and he found out he was HIV positive. "I knew I would die if I didn't throw myself into theater," says Landry. By the early '90s Landry was becoming a drag icon in Provincetown. He was the creator and organizer of "Super Stars," a talent show for drag performers held at the Crown and Anchor. Locals still remember Landry's routine of a stoned Marcia Brady singing Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit." It was around this time that Landry formed an all-drag softball league. One friend of Landry's recalls the nontraditional scoring: "If you got to second base with your wig still on, you scored a point, if you ran all the bases in high heels, there was another point." In 1990 Landry started the Mandalay Opera House and traveled to Seattle, Miami Beach, and Provincetown staging plays by Charles Ludlum and Charles Bush. Every year, the company would go to the Barnstable County Fair in full drag, only to be escorted out by police because they made some of the fairgoers nervous. Drug abuse and infighting among cast members broke up the Mandalay, which was gaining recognition as a premier cross-dressing cabaret.

In 1994, Landry started the glam-punk band Space Pussy, named after a character in a Ludlum play. Landry was the lead vocalist, but there were guest vocalists like Broadway star Lea Delaria. The band played before a crowd of 50,000 at Wiggstock in New York City. Celebrities like Aerosmith's Steven Tyler courted Space Pussy. Landry entered into a management deal with Bob Rook (former manager of the band Boston and owner of the Emack and Bolio's ice cream chain) who suggested the frontman take a seventy percent cut of the band's earnings. "I wrote the lyrics and the music and the rest of the band did the arrangements. I told the band I wanted forty percent." A recurring pattern of jealousy and infighting emerged just as Space Pussy was getting ready to make a record deal. "Now Space Pussy plays at dump dances and occasionally at the Cape Cod Melody Tent," Landry says sadly. Landry says the Dollhouse "is doing well because we've grown up. I'm not as hard to work with as people may think, but it has to be done my way. Jim keeps the company together ... Scott is in charge of set design. More and more people are getting involved in the day to day operation. It's no longer the Ryan Landry machine."

Landry sits on a stage cluttered with scripts, eating yogurt with a plastic fork. He is dressed in a threadbare, black and red checked flannel shirt and worn-out jeans. He is a handsome man. His lankiness, thick head of unruly black hair, masculine intensity, and comical stubble make him look more like a graduate student in mathematics than a drag queen. It's hard to believe that he can transform himself into a woman, much less a beautiful woman. But Landry is a master of illusion. Framed posters of each of his shows attest to his abilities at skirting the line between beautiful and bumbling. Landry as Sabrina, the smartest of Charlie's angels, the only non-pin-up girl. Landry looking something like Claudette Colbert in *Johnny Guitar*, and Landry as Mrs. Grinchley, wearing a phallus for a nose. Landry sees drag as a clown mask. "I'm not saying that a woman's face is a clown mask. I'm saying that drag is a clown mask. There's a difference." He makes it clear that he is not trying to emulate women. "I'm just trying to say the gender thing is a ridiculous concept ... besides of course genitalia."

Yes, there is always some physical sign of who a person really is. With Landry, for whom the aphorism "things are not what they seem" seems fitting, it may be the tattoo on his right forearm—a Tasmanian devil captioned "legna" (angel spelled backward), with all its mischievous incongruity, tells it like it might or might not be.

Margaret Carroll-Bergman's scholarly writings on abortion and prohibition were published in the anthology History in Dispute (St. James Press, 2000).

The Aural Edges of John Thomas

If not for him, says John Thomas, some other person would be accomplishing the same things in and for Provincetown. But it's hard to imagine anyone else filling his shoes as composer, pianist, writer, director, actor, lawyer, community activist, local historian, and impresario. Although Thomas' deep involvement in the cultural and political life of Provincetown would appear to come from long familiarity with the place and its people, he moved to the Outer Cape only eight years ago, having worked as an artist in Provincetown during the previous two years. All the more notable, then, how he communicates and facilitates the spirit, aspirations, and concerns of the entire Provincetown community. As composer and performer, Thomas organizes or participates in perhaps the majority of musical concert events in town. He also composes for musical theater and often handles story and words as well. As lawyer and historian, Thomas has researched and disseminated the history of the relationship between local culture, state and federal government, and the prized environment of the Outer Cape, and has worked to further communication and understanding between parties whose perceived interests may appear to differ. With a lawyer's diligence and an artist's vision, he strives to communicate human experience both local and global, and to bring people together.

As a teenager Thomas studied piano and drama. Later, he pursued other interests, graduating from Northeastern University School of Law in 1984. He practiced law, but within a few years felt the need to devote himself more to creative pursuits, and began to compose and perform in musical revues in the Boston area. In 1990, he appeared as actor and pianist in *Our Time*, a critically praised take on gay life in America. In 1991 he collaborated with Abe Rybeck on a musical, *Pure PolyESTHER: a biblical burlesque*. Staged at Boston's BCA Theatre by the Theater Offensive with Thomas among the cast, the show ran for two years, followed by regular revivals. Like all of Thomas' theatrical projects since, *Pure PolyESTHER* reaches into history for its subject. The *Boston Globe* described a 1999 revival, which it

named one of the year's ten best small theater events, as "a lewd and lively drag revamp of the biblical story of Esther ... a ribald homage to gay liberation." In the play, Esther's ancient act of coming out as a Jew in order to save her people serves as a metaphor for contemporary coming-out issues. A gay romance is grafted onto the biblical narrative, and a healthy dose of cross-dressing and hearty sexuality is added. Thomas holds that when his theater works contain gay themes, he and his collaborators always intend them for a wider audience, for most of the ostensibly gay concerns are ultimately manifestations of universal ones, while the shows contain music and humor with broad appeal.

Thomas moved to Provincetown in 1992 with the intent of concentrating full-time on composition and writing. His creative output surged. In 1993, he issued *Remembrance*, a recording of new piano, choral, and instrumental compositions. Drawing on his training as a classical pianist, Thomas' piano music melds considerable technique with a romantic sensibility, impressionistic textures, and elements of contemporary popular style. Flow, chord, and pattern predominate; no edges here. Most of the recording's choral music has a religious association, from the story of his grandmother's conversion (her voice is heard behind the music), to works written for liturgical performance. Thomas also presents other composers' music, arranging a 1770s Shaker melody for chorus and giving a heartfelt solo performance of a well-known Brahms intermezzo from the 1890s.

Also in 1993, Thomas premiered a new play in collaboration with Joe Byers. *TightAss Androgynous*, as the none-too-subtle title suggests, took Shakespeare's "bloodiest and least literary play" and transformed it into what Thomas terms a "splatter

musical, Sweeney Todd-style," with appropriate music—dissonant, edgy, rhythmic—hardly the style of *Remembrance*. While Thomas' instrumental music is usually calm, centered, expansive, evocative, his theatrical and event-centered music is highly varied. Musical theater numbers evoke Broadway sophistication, operatic expression, and ethnic or national styles where appropriate. Choral pieces convey the emotions and messages of their texts. No matter what the medium, though, Thomas intends that his music tell stories, and that his listeners accompany him on a journey. Journeys, he states, are not always predictable nor completely palatable; part of their impact is to take you outside of your comfort zone and leave you changed upon return.

One of Thomas' first projects in Provincetown was the ongoing composition of a large work for chorus and orchestra, the *Vigil Cantata*. Each year from 1994 to 1998, at the annual International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization, held at the Unitarian Universalist Meeting House, he has premiered a new movement of the cantata, to texts by Shakespeare, Homer, and Whitman, among others. Some of Thomas' angriest music is to be found in this work; you don't need to know the text to understand the message. In 1995, Thomas premiered *Spontaneous Me*, based on writings of Walt Whitman and others' writings about him. This was a rare solo effort; out of a deeply felt connection with the poet and his message, Thomas selected and arranged the texts, composed a forty-minute cinema-style soundtrack, and acted the poet onstage. For these efforts, *Provincetown Magazine's* reviewer wrote, "John Thomas gives eloquent and exuberant voice to Whitman's vision ... I can't recall being so moved by a performer and his material in quite a long time." The following year Thomas began another annual Provincetown event, *Trance/Formation*, which sprang from his interest in music and instruments of distant cultures. The forces behind



PHOTO: BRAD FOWLER

this "mystical experience" include a grand piano, tribal drums, vocal chant, electric sitar, Tibetan bowls, flute, electric violin, ambient tones, lights, and a theremin, an early electronic instrument with a spooky, wavelike sound familiar from mid-20th-century science-fiction film soundtracks: in all, nearly a hundred minutes of spiritual state evoked by music. (Thomas always mentions the length of each of his works as an essential descriptive fact; that's the lawyer in him.) Local performers Jon Arterton, the late Laurel Brooke, Brianna Caton, Robin Hendrich, and Sylvie Richard, along with James Coleman on theremin, have continued to join Thomas in this yearly tradition.

Thomas' deep identification with Provincetown arose not only with his personal attraction to the area but also from his long-abiding interest in the concerns of indigenous cultural groups. In law school he focused on Native American rights. Once on the Outer Cape, he shifted his attention to the indigenous population of the region, the diverse successive wavelets of immigration, and inhabitants' relationship with the Province Lands, protected by state, then federal law for over 300 years. Starting in 1997 Thomas wrote several dozen articles for *Provincetown Magazine*, detailing the history of the legal relationship between the state and the town, and the lengthy process of establishing the National Seashore. According to Thomas, authorities always recognized that creating a national park on the Outer Cape would constitute a special case, since the area was fairly well-populated for generations. He discovered that the Seashore's enabling legislation had three provisions rather than the usual two—not only to safeguard the environment and to provide reasonable access, but also to "further and maintain the local ways of life." He feels strongly that the third provision has been ignored. As a member of the citizens group We the People of Provincetown he has worked with the town government to strengthen formal links to newly receptive Seashore officials. Thomas' further concern is with the newest group of newcomers to the region. His worry: "Because of the mix of money that's come in with the new immigrant group, we're in a real tender situation; we're in a race against time. Can we educate enough people about how wonderful it is so they like it and want to keep it that way? And that's starting to happen—I'm feeling very good about that."

By 1999 Thomas was involved in a good dozen events as composer, performer, and/or impresario within a fourteen-week season. These included solo and group concerts, the annual events, and important concerts bringing together new works by local composers. Thomas is as much catalyst as musician; this is not a composer who writes by himself for himself. After this flurry of activity, Thomas made a millennial pilgrimage to Nepal and Tibet, a part of the world which had always fascinated him. Visiting Tibetan monasteries and trekking in Nepal, he encountered breathtaking aural stimuli: the prayer bells and chanting of the monasteries; the profound quiet, rustle of leaves, and jingle of horses' bells of the mountains. While in Nepal he improvised music with some of the country's most prominent sitar and tabla players

on one of the "less than a dozen pianos which exist in the whole country—that's not how they make music." Some young friends there, rock musicians in the city of Pokhara, led him to an unexpectedly state-of-the-art digital recording studio, where in four and a half hours he had composed and mixed a twelve-minute piece, *Annapurna*, which simultaneously reflected his impressions of the vast natural landscape he had witnessed, and the sadness he felt at the news that a dear friend was seriously ill with cancer. *Annapurna* describes a state of being, combining a persistent low drone with other smoothly drawn-out instrumental sounds, whispers and sighs, and a slowly moving harmonic background.

Back at home in his studio in the North Truro house of gallery owner Berta Walker, Thomas set to his latest project, another historically-inspired musical. *Walt and Oscar's Wilde Weekend* builds on Thomas' fascination with Whitman, and his discovery that the poet met twice with Oscar Wilde during the latter's lecture tour in the United States in 1882. The first meeting was formal and documented, but Thomas uncovered evidence of a second, undocumented meeting; thus the opportunity for the playwright to mix fact with fantasy, creating a "musical fantasia based on historical writings, rumour, and innuendo," imagining the exchange of ideas the two might have had, and imagining an intimate relationship between them. Since Wilde's tour was sponsored by Richard d'Oyly Carte, Thomas supplemented his sophisticated Sondheim-like score with a Gilbert-and-Sullivan-style patter song. Premiered in April as the inaugural event in the second annual Provincetown Poetry Festival, the cast included singers Mary Abt, Jon Arterton, and Mary Jo Paranzino (known as The Three Marys), Peter Bez, Richard Buckley, and Stanley Wilson; actress Beverly Bentley; and musicians Brianna Caton, Diane Fisher, Robin Hendrich, Peter Orgain, and Sandy Spencer.

So, what now? Thomas' plate would seem to be plenty full, as another season replete with performances and new compositions approaches. He plans to expand and polish *Walt and Oscar's Wilde Weekend*, and to rework the entire *Vigil Cantata* into a fully orchestrated and choral piece. Still, he finds himself in his own comfort zone and feels the itch to transcend it. While continuing his local activities, Thomas hopes to find opportunities to produce present and future work in New York or Los Angeles. Having given so much to Provincetown, and in his mind having gotten so much more in return, who could fault his desire to focus some of his energy outward? For most of us, artistic activity in Provincetown means visual arts and creative writing. Thanks in no small part to John Thomas, music and musical theater are now once again becoming a vital part of the landscape.

David Kopp, a pianist and music theorist, teaches at the University of Washington. He wrote about the composer Arthur Berger in last year's issue of Provincetown Arts.

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Sea Shanties and Squid:

A Conversation with

Zoë Lewis

LOUISE RAFKIN

Singer/songwriter Zoë Lewis is a stalwart Provincetown performer, appearing solo as well as alongside her "Rubber Band," which features Kate Wolf on bass, Sylvie Richard on percussion, and Zoë on everything from piano to harmonica to ukulele. While other seasonal artists flit in and out of P'town, treating it like a summer fling, Zoë, who first arrived in 1992, has clearly fallen in love with the place and has made a commitment to a serious relationship. Her songs reflect the magic of a place which, in her words, "defies stereotypes," a place where all types of people live harmoniously and with respect for each others' differences. Lewis plays a number of venues—gay, straight, and mixed—and hangs out with people of all genders and persuasions. She counts among her favorite folk fishermen, ladies at the Cape End Manor, drag queens, and lesbian Buddhist monks, and her audiences reflect her association with a wide range of locals.

Born and raised in a southern English fishing village, Zoë nows calls Provincetown "home," and can be found dashing up and down Commercial Street on her trusty blue bicycle, that is, when she's not touring the country with her band, playing on a lesbian cruise, or exploring an open market in some far-off country. Her recent CD releases, *Sheep* and *Full of Faraway*, include songs that reflect her love for our town, as well as her delight in traveling.

LOUISE RAFKIN: Let's start out with a word association. What comes to mind when I say Provincetown?

ZOË LEWIS: Clamming, squidding, the Mayflower restaurant, sitting on the street curb chatting with friends, the fabulous ladies in the post office, my bicycle, which got stolen and now is back

again, thanks to a lot of caring townie detectives, in general, the diversity of life in this little village. And the incredible creativity. Plus the stark contrast between summer and winter, the shifting spring season when 3,000 people swell to upwards of 30,000. This year, I've been getting to know a bit about the civic aspect of the town. I went to Town Meeting—though as an alien I'm not allowed to vote, I enjoyed it, especially the colorful characters. Even P'town's selectmen are extravagant! This is not a normal town. That's why I love it.

LR: Many performers come through Provincetown and call it home for a summer, but few really make it home. How did you come to call this home?

ZL: When I came to town I thought I was going to do one gig, with the Lesbian Lounge Lizards, but I hadn't reckoned on falling for the place. This town is similar in some ways to my home village, Rottingdean, though in Rottingdean the old ladies have poodles and here the young men sport them. As I stuck around, I began to see all the different layers in the community. There's the obvious gay layer of life here, but then I got to know the local Portuguese scene, and then the local children and older folks, plus the artists and writers, of course. Every year I live here it seems I uncover more of what makes this town special. Because I travel in the winter, I find this is a really great place to stay still. P'town answers my need for home and I feel happy that I discovered it so early in my life.

LR: Your song "Pies for the Public" tells the life story of Charlotte Matta, a woman who lives at the Cape End Manor. How did you come to get this story?

ZL: I was playing a gig in the Manor and started talking about my love of tea. Charlotte came up to me and told me she could make a good cuppa and then she told me all about her pies and I loved hearing about P'town during the depression and how the fishermen came in and bought her lemon and clam pies. I mean, of course, lemon and clam being two different pies!

LR: You're in town half the year?

ZL: I'm in and out like a yo-yo during the whole off-season, but more or less I'm here six to eight months in total. If I happen to fall in love with someone here, then I'm here even more.

LR: And when you're not here?

ZL: I'm in England to see my mum, who is eighty-seven, on tour being a troubadour, or heading somewhere far away that's exotic and warm.

LR: Your songs all tell tales, stories of your interests and adventures. How do you go about your writing and storytelling?

LR: I call my songs lounge/folk because they're a bit of both really, and I write about what I know. When I'm traveling I pick up all sorts of different grooves and musical influences. It's so inspiring to be in new places, but I find if I look around me at home there's just so much to write about here. Right now I'm obsessed with fishing and have recently written about the joys of squidding. Lots of my songs are about seafaring. One of my latest is about wanting to be like Jacques Cousteau.

LR: You give tourists an inside line on P'town life, the life of the locals, and it seems to me that the

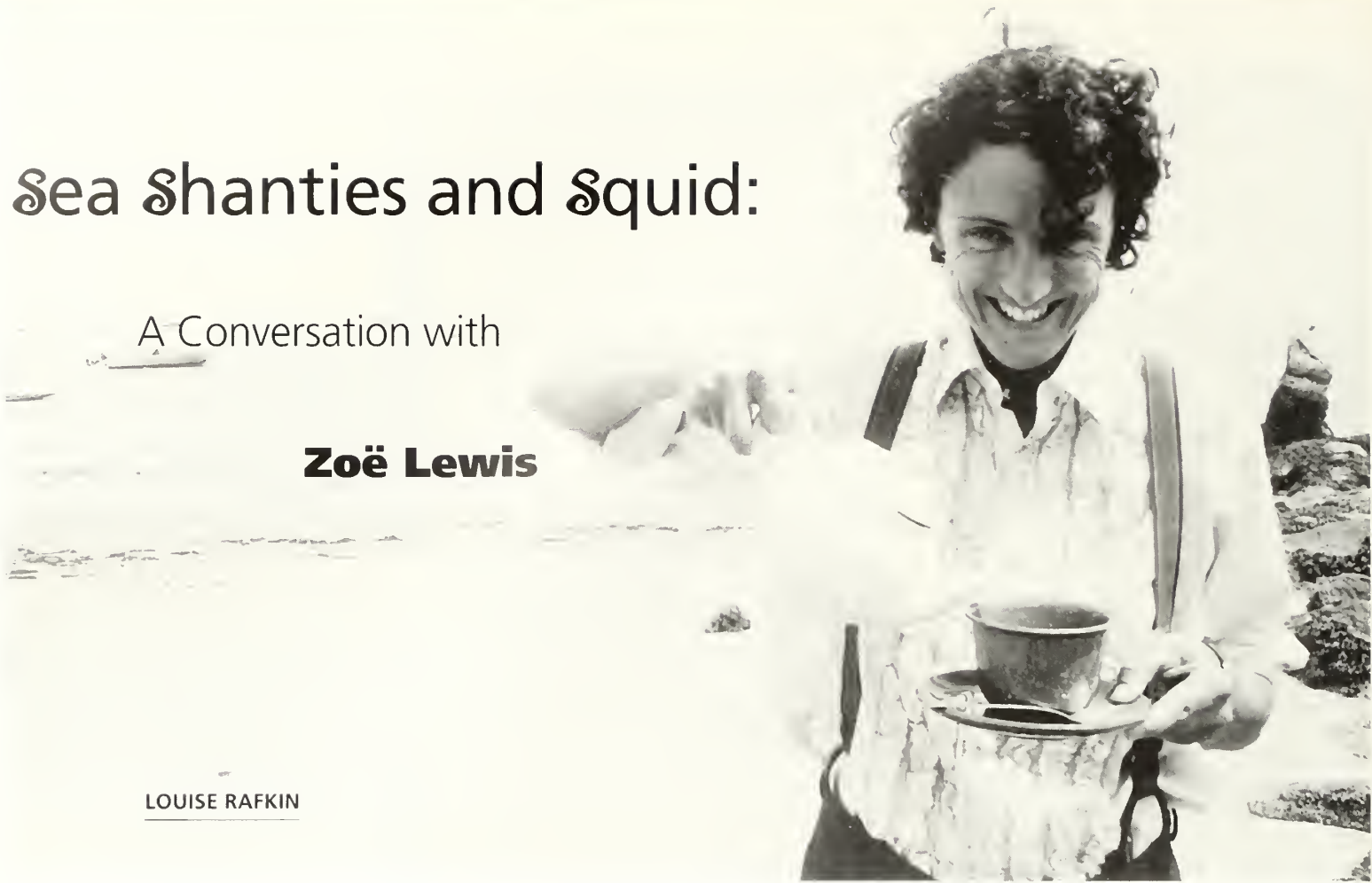


PHOTO: DEB MARTIN

people who come to see you really understand that this is a gift.

ZL: When I go traveling I try to find the places where the locals go, then I get to really feel the place I'm visiting. I hope my songs reflect some of this side of P'town, beyond all the money-making tourist stuff. I'm so proud of this town I want visitors to experience the other parts, too, not just Commercial Street. That's why I play so many different venues—so I can play to all the different types of visitors.

LR: You've been here almost a decade, how do you feel about the changes in the town?

ZL: I think fewer performers are coming to town because they just can't afford the high rents. Also, the pianos are disappearing! There are fewer pianos because they take up valuable table space in the restaurants and more people need to dine. Except for The Boatslip, the grands have disappeared altogether. It's tragic.

LR: That is tragic. So, do you think priorities are changing?

ZL: Money is definitely ruling things a bit more in this booming economy, but there is still enough of the old spirit around to keep things going.

LR: What kind of adventures lie ahead?

ZL: Lots of touring in the U.S., as well as Costa Rica, and some cruises. I dream of doing a round-the-world tour and playing in lots of little fishing villages. I feel like I do better in small fishing towns, because the people there understand songs about squid! But sometimes when I play big cities, the people will sing along with me even though there is no water nearby. I try to bring them a sense of the sea, the spirit of fishing, the joy I feel in my town.

Louise Rafkin is the author of Other People's Dirt. A former Truro yearounder, she's now a summer friend.

A few of Zoë's lyrics:

Hello, my name is Charlotte
I live by the sea
in a little town where I know everybody
and everybody seems to know me
Now my hair's the color of a snowflake
I've got a couple aching bones
and there's just too many of us to a room
in the old folks home
—from "Pies for the Public"

Let's go squidding
with the grandpas and boys
I'm really not kidding
it's full of summertime joys
I got ink on my hands
and a jig on the line
and enough in my bucket for dinnertime
—from "Let's Go Squidding"

I want to be like Jacques Cousteau
a sort of aquamarine Clouseau
a little bristle on my chin
a salty sunkissed leather skin
the world beneath the deep
is where I want to go
I want to be like Jacques Cousteau
—from "Jacques Cousteau"

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You Don't Have to Be Amazing

We haven't known each other long. Rob Nadeau's a painter from Rochester; Maurice Manning's a poet from Kentucky; and I'm a poet, lately from Chicago. We all meet in October when we start our fellowships at the Fine Arts Work Center. I'm not quite sure how it happens. One night I hear Rob and Maurice playing together in the Center's common room—Rob on piano, Maurice on guitar. Then the next night, I'm singing.

I'm pretty intimidated—Maurice and Rob seem to have a fluency on their instruments that I don't, and they've both been in bands before. They're barreling away on blues, bluegrass, and classic rock, while I'm used to squeaking out pretty pop jazz. I don't feel like a musician, just like someone who can carry a tune. That first night I think the only song all three of us know is Patsy Cline's "Walking After Midnight." After a couple of sessions, I suggest that we need to shape "Summertime," crescendoing from a reverie to a jam and back again, an idea they both like. Flush with that small success, I find enough courage to scat during the jam.

We talk about braving the open mike at The Mews' Monday-night Coffeehouse. We've been there once or twice, and it feels like a good place to christen our act. Rob and I and some of the other fellows go the next Monday night and hear Peter Donnelly, the host, and Ron Robbins, the Mews' owner, talking about renting a piano for the week's feature act. Rob offers to let them use his own electric keyboard, for which we get a spot on the open mike roster, and Rob gets free drinks.

The Mews Coffeehouse is finishing its ninth season. According to Peter, he pitched the idea of a "Coffeehouse" program to Ron shortly after moving to Provincetown. He was teaching himself to play guitar and write music and was looking for a place to try things out. "I think about the Coffeehouse as a tool, a workshop." He says that the idea is to give people a chance. "You don't have to be amazing. It's a place to figure out if you even want to be on stage."

The first night we play, Peter introduces us as "The Work Center Triplets." Later, Dan Towler, the Buildings and Grounds guru at the Center, dubs us "Fellowship of Fools." Though the audience is composed mostly of friendly Work Center faces and the Mews has one of the kindest audiences I've ever seen at a Coffeehouse, I'm terrified. This isn't me singing at a recital planned by my voice teacher—I'm fronting a band. I have to say stuff in between songs. Funny stuff, or at



PAULETTE SINGS PHOTO: WALT GREELEY

They tell me to sing it with a microphone and just make it dirty, though they have no specific ideas for how you "dirty" a song.

least interesting. I try to think of a few stories but settle for what feels like a lot of smiling and thank yous. At the end of our set, Peter offers us a feature spot, which we eagerly accept, though we'll only have two weeks to learn enough songs to fill a half-hour set.

The first year of the Coffeehouse, a lot of the performers were writers, many from the Work Center. The Coffeehouse eventually diversified, attracting musicians and other types of performers, such as jugglers, videographers, performance artists. Peter says the idea of featured performers was added to "raise the level."

Still, the Coffeehouse remains true to its mission, being about the performers' relation to the stage itself rather than about pleasing the audience. Performers and readers have included Michael Klein, Marie Howe, Tim Seibles, Gary Arnold and Katie Curtis. This season I've seen everyone from Princess Leia, who reads pithy pseudo-proverbs she calls "Leia-isms" to Rob Scott, a jazz piano and guitar playing Bob Dylan-voiced sometimes rap artist, to Theresa Rogers, who moved to San Francisco just after her feature night to build her music career.

The first week is hard for me as we try to expand our repertoire. I specialize in bluesy torch songs, and Maurice and Rob want me to do more wailing blues and bluegrass/folk songs. I try Susan Tedeschi's "Hurt So Bad" (my idea) and a prison song, "Mama Tried" (their idea). "Hurt So Bad" is bad, but not awful. "Mama Tried," in which I screech out "I turned twenty-one in prison

doing life without parole," is worse than awful. I explain to Maurice and Rob that it's not sitting in the right part of my throat, and they look at me blankly. They tell me to sing it with a microphone and just make it dirty, though they have no specific ideas for how you "dirty" a song. I leave each rehearsal that week frustrated and with a sore throat.

I think a lot about what I want out of the band. Rob and Maurice continually chide me to just have fun. But for me, it feels more serious than that; I have something to prove. I'm at war with myself—I'm not sure if I'm pushing my voice too hard or if I'm not pushing it hard enough. I decide that there are just certain songs I can't do, and I feel like a failure. Rob and Maurice are supportive, though Rob still thinks my voice can do a lot more than I think it can. It's important that I sound good to others, and even more so, to my own hyper-critical ears. It's not that Rob and Maurice don't sound good, or don't want to sound good, it's just that the rough edges seem to bother me more. I'm not sure what to make of this, since in poetry, it's the rough edges I most enjoy.

We decide that as part of our set we'll break into duets so each of us can do "our" kind of music. Rob and I work up a version of the jazz standard "Gee Baby, Ain't I Good To You" while Maurice and I choose "Poor Wayfaring Stranger," a blues spiritual. I take a break, and the boys blister through a version of "Going Out on the Highway." Maurice starts singing harmony, and I have fun playing off his voice. After each rehearsal that second week, I'm full of energy and a great desire to play ping-pong—a definite sign things are going well.

Even though I've sung before, singing with a band is different. I'm used to learning music with my voice teacher, then practicing once with the accompanist before I sing at a wedding or recital. Collaboration—actually sitting down and

hammering out arrangements—is new to me. I'm so excited that I write everybody I know that I'm in a band and that we're going to be on the radio. Every Wednesday, Provincetown's local radio station, WOMR, broadcasts an hour's worth of that week's Coffeehouse.

One night, while waiting for rehearsal to start, I ask Rob why he's a painter and not a professional piano player. He says he enjoys playing but he'd rather save his energy for his painting. I mention that it seems like people who are strong in one artistic medium are usually strong in another one as well. Woody Allen is primarily known as a filmmaker, though he's also an accomplished clarinetist with his own band. And both Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan straddle that songwriter/poet line, though they're primarily known as singer-songwriters. We have to make a choice—either figure out how to incorporate both artistic strengths, like Dylan and Mitchell, or pursue one art full-blast, hoping there's time left over for the other one, like Woody Allen. I tell Rob that I've directed my energies into poetry because the high I get when a poem is working is like nothing else I ever feel.

I start to wonder if I've been shortchanging myself by not working more on singing. I think I hold part of myself back when I sing, while in writing I consistently work at letting go. One of my voice teachers used to tell me I "dished it up on a plate, but didn't quite serve it." Music and poetry are inseparable to me, and my more recent poems have included blues verses meant to be sung. Still, I haven't worked at singing as aggressively as my writing. Aside from the issue of time, I wonder if being successful at poetry isn't as scary to me as being a successful singer. I also wonder what exactly it is I'm scared of.

A few days before the gig, we find out Peter has mistakenly double-booked our night. We're upset to see advertising all over town for the other feature, but are still glad just to have a place to play. When we arrive at the Mews, we find out that serendipitously, the other feature has canceled. No one signs up for open mike, so Peter sings a few of his songs to warm up. The three of us sit at a back table. Rob sips a scotch while Maurice and I nervously watch people walk in. I'm drinking water, though I really want a whisky. I curse the rule I have about not drinking alcohol before I sing. I keep running downstairs to the ladies room and panic about what I'll do if nature calls during the set.

Peter finally calls us to the stage. During the sound check I keep my head down and mumble into the microphone. I feel naked without the music behind me. Peter introduces each of us individually. I reply as if I'm a Miss America contestant. Though people laugh, to my ears, I sound wooden and unfunny.

We start off with "Call It Stormy Monday," which Maurice and I have arranged, so we trade off verses. He gets to his verse and sings out of time, prompting him to stop and have us start again. This time I sing out of time, but when Maurice looks at me puzzled, I shrug my shoulders and slide into the right rhythm for the second verse. At the end of the song I quip to the crowd

"Wow, are you guys glad we got through that one, because I am!" It feels like some other me has taken over. This other Paulette laughs and jokes and flirts in a way I usually can't. And though I can let her lead when I'm talking to the audience, I still can't wholly give over control when I sing. Though the audience can't seem to tell, the sounds in my head don't quite match what comes out of my mouth. I feel exposed and vulnerable if I'm not in control. It's one thing to give up control to that artistic other self when I'm writing poetry, alone. I can take back control in the editing process, long before anyone else sees my work. But here onstage, I have to give over control publicly, in the moment. What if my technique falters or I forget the words? What if I expose too much?

The rest of the set goes smoothly—the only interruption being when someone buys us a round of drinks. The other Paulette says, "Excuse us, we're getting beverage service. So is this to make us sound even better?" The crowd laughs, and I let go a little more, start to relax. By the time we get down to our last few songs, we're all calm and happy. I don't blink an eye when Rob cuts off "Summertime" earlier than we've rehearsed to launch into our encore. We play two more songs after that and only stop because we run out of songs that we all know. On "Walking After Midnight," I can't stop smiling; it sounds exactly the way I've imagined it.

That Wednesday, I listen to us on WOMR, expecting to end up with a long list of "Next time I should sing it like this" and "Next time I have to make sure I don't go flat on that." Surprisingly, I'm quite pleased with the tape, especially the sexy-voiced singer who, like a pro, introduces herself and the rest of the band before launching into a throaty rendition of "What'd I Say." I play it through a few times, lying on the floor, eyes closed, just enjoying the music.

The holidays come and the band goes its separate ways for a few weeks. When we come back, I ask a couple of times if we can rehearse but Rob is busy working on an installation piece and Maurice is preparing for job interviews. And then I get busy writing poems for my reading.

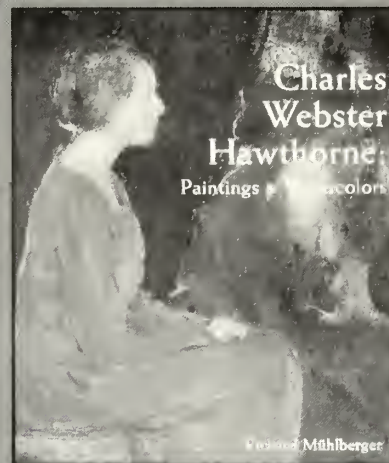
We've only two months left as fellows, and we still haven't played together again, though we would like to do another gig before we all leave Provincetown. I've taken Peter's advice and thought a lot about if the stage is really the place I want to be, not just as a poet who sings, but as a singer who also happens to be a poet. I plan to spend the summer learning enough about myself, about my relationship to music, to know exactly what to put in the ad for the band I might start when I get back to Chicago. I want to learn how to let all of that other me onto that stage, to finally figure out how to get the plate to the table, and leave them asking for seconds.

Paulette Beete's poetry appears in these pages.

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Putting the Sizzle in the Steak: A Conversation with Alix Ritchie about Campus Provincetown

For two years now, a consortium of community leaders has been developing a plan to bolster Provincetown's off-season economy. The idea is simple. In essence: take what you have (an array of educational resources), give it a catchy name ("Campus Provincetown"), and they (hungry minds from far and wide) will come. Sounds like Marketing 101, but in an artists colony not exactly teeming with business school grads (yet), the enterprise has been a little bewildering.

Not to *Banner* publisher Alix Ritchie, the visionary mind behind the Campus Provincetown concept. Here, for those whose first word-associations upon thinking of Provincetown are "light," "art," "landscape," or any of many poetic musings, a primer on the benefits of "marketing platforms" and "product packaging"—terms we'll all get acquainted with as the economic realities of life in a beautiful boom-time town become ever more apparent.

—JENNIFER LIESE

HUNTER O'HANIAN: I first remember seeing the name Campus Provincetown in an article you wrote in the *Banner* a few years ago. What made you write that story?

ALIX RITCHIE: We have a hidden industry in Provincetown—an education industry, both in-season and off-season. I thought we ought to take advantage of that, do a better job of identifying ourselves. I started to think that with the existing organizations and efforts, Provincetown itself was beginning to look like a campus. Campus Provincetown just rolled out from that. It's had a magnetic quality, drawing many individuals and organizations to the table.

HOH: But why education?

AR: It was here already. There is some wonderful talent and resources here, but we have to face the reality that there isn't a yearround economy in town. While there are some indigenous small businesses, there really aren't many other options for industry.

HOH: Exactly. We can't put manufacturing facilities along Route 6. But we aren't building a college are we?

AR: No. We really aren't creating anything new. It's just taking what individual organizations are already doing and creating a new marketing platform that helps everyone market their educational opportunities. We might be creating the sizzle by packaging the collective offerings, but the steak was there. We want to let those who come here for the fun and sun in the summer know they can come back in the off-season and partake in the town in a way that is more intimate and hopefully more enlightening.

HOH: And the "campus," what is that? There seems to be some confusion.

AR: Provincetown has a special sense of intimacy—a walking environment, with a unified campus feeling. The town itself is the "campus."

HOH: So, in other words, the Work Center and the Art Association are the art department, the Center for Coastal Studies is the environmental sciences department, the theater companies will be the drama department, the guest houses are the dorms, the restaurants are the dining halls, the shops become the co-op. When you think of it, the residential and business portion of Provincetown is probably close to the same size as a medium-sized college.

AR: Exactly.

HOH: We use the term "education industry," but that also creates some confusion.

AR: I think we have to think of education as a product that we're selling. We are selling the knowledge, talent, experience, and opportunities we have here and sharing them with others. Campus Provincetown allows us to package and market it under one umbrella organization. That way, if someone from Iowa wants to take a course at the Fine Arts Work Center, the Provincetown International Art Institute, or the Center for Coastal Studies, they can access those opportunities through one package. We were fortunate that our timing was concurrent with the PIAI offering its first classes.

HOH: But Campus Provincetown won't be directing the programming for those organizations, will it?

AR: One of the wonderful things about the existing institutions in Provincetown is how closely they guard their independence. Of course Campus Provincetown won't interfere with programming

within any of the organizations. I doubt Campus Provincetown itself will ever offer a course.

HOH: What support have you seen from the business community?

AR: I don't think there's a business in this town that doesn't need Campus Provincetown, even those that close in the winter. It's in all of our interests to have a yearround economy. It's important to offer jobs to those who stay through the winter. I think its notable that the Chamber of Commerce, particularly Candy Collins-Boden, has been involved in this idea from the get-go. The Provincetown Business Guild also seems to be coming aboard.

HOH: Do you see a role for the businesses in town?

AR: That's the point. The businesses participate by offering their services throughout the year to the students. Shops and restaurants may be able to hire more people later in the season, and guest houses hopefully will see more guests.

HOH: What about courses? So far we have been talking about courses offered by the non-profits. Is it possible to offer hotel and motel management courses at the Provincetown Inn, for instance, or a two-week seminar on how to run a guest house? I understand cooking courses are now available at Clem & Ursie's.

AR: Why not? It's possible for these courses to be accredited through the Cape Cod Community College. It seems pretty evident that the possibilities are endless, particularly through distance learning and tele-commuting.

HOH: What about those who say, "I like Provincetown the way it is in the off-season, nice and quiet. Why should we try to bring anyone else here?"

AR: Well that's fine as long as you have a place to live and some bucks in your pocket. But it's not so nice if you can't afford your rent or even an occasional movie. If people don't want to participate, of course no one is going to make them, but there are plenty of people who would like to see it a little more active in the off-season. I remember a winter when everything in town was closed. It was terrible. The great fear in my mind is that Provincetown is going to become a summer-only community. If everything is closed in the winter, there will be no community. Plus, if we strengthen the off-season educational offering, imagine the impact it will have on our public schools. That's why



Susan Fleming, the superintendant of the Provincetown Schools, has been so involved.

HOH: But what about you? You obviously love the town, but do you need Campus Provincetown? Does the *Banner* need Campus Provincetown?

AR: I love this place too much to see it become a summer play pen. It's a much bigger place than that. I don't want to build more buildings or put stress on our limited resources, but if everyone can make a living in the winter, we are all better off. Yes, indeed the *Banner* needs Campus Provincetown, and so do I.

HOH: So lets talk more specifically about how it will work.

AR: We've done our homework. We took the first step, which was to identify the products the organizations were offering. The next step, which will begin this summer, is to let the world know what we're doing. We've put up a sophisticated website and will be distributing 100,000 brochures and printing our first comprehensive course catalog. We hired Mike Hattersley as director. He has a great background in higher education and marketing. I think we are moving fairly aggressively.

HOH: In a little more than a year, we have gone from an idea to having a catalog printed. It's remarkable.

AR: Even if we say so ourselves!

HOH: How will we know when Campus Provincetown is a success?

AR: I think we'll know when each member organization is doing as much as each can in terms of educational offerings. Beyond that, success will be seen when the town doesn't close up in the winter. We aren't looking for it to be like August yearround. But if each month could be like October, it would be great. Don't you agree?

HOH: Well, the Work Center has two very successful programs—the Winter Fellowship and Summer Workshop programs. But we're active in Campus Provincetown because it's part of our mission to help stimulate the economy in the winter. It was the vision of Hudson Walker, one of the Work Center's founders, to put \$500 a month in twenty fellows' pockets to be spent locally in the winter. Now, the Work Center's winter fellowship program spends more than \$300,000 with Provincetown businesses. And there's no telling the financial impact of Summer Program. Last summer, Work Center students

purchased more than 2,400 guest house nights in Provincetown.

AR: Also, since it's part of the Work Center's mission to reinvigorate the artistic life of the town, the more we make it livable on a yearround basis, the more attractive it will be for artists and writers to relocate here permanently. To go back to the campus analogy, by making this a wonderful experience for our visitors, we are developing an alumni association.

HOH: That's right. From were I sit, the success of Campus Provincetown will be determined by whether this becomes more of a yearround community. If we can produce one, two, or ten more jobs, we've succeeded. If we see the fifty percent winter unemployment rate decrease significantly, we should be very proud.

AR: We're taking baby steps. As I go around the Cape and talk to people, they are extremely interested in what we're doing. They think this is a great idea. They see the town as being very smart. Campus Provincetown is a key to our economic future.

Fine Arts Work Center Executive Director Hunter O'Hanion is among the founding members of the Campus Provincetown consortium.

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Center for Coastal Studies
Fine Arts Work Center
Pilgrim Monument & Provincetown Museum
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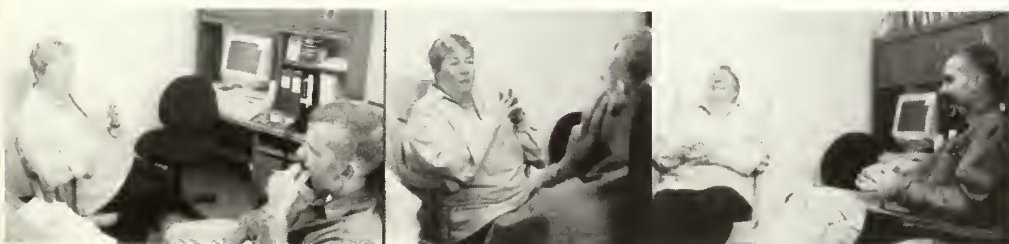
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Splendor in **Suspense**: The New Whalers' Wharf

SOME HAVE PRAISED IT as the proverbial "Phoenix rising from the ashes." Others view it as an intrusive monstrosity bursting forth from the earth. From the cleared rubble of the massive fire of February 1998, which destroyed the original Whalers' Wharf, a new incarnation has arisen. And while fiercely vocal opponents decry obstructed water views and encroachment upon the character of the town, there are just as many who hail the new Whalers' Wharf as a great boon to Provincetown and its artisans.

During this writing, it has been a challenge to stay abreast of the controversy that began after the new building's construction was more than just a bit underway. Ground broke in December of 1999, but little outcry was heard until the formidable steel skeleton, appearing far larger than its beloved predecessor, stretched toward the skies. Passersby mourned the uninterrupted water vista revealed after the fire; many had hoped the town would maintain the site as a park on the sea.

Despite these hopes, the property proved far too valuable and its economic potential too grand to keep the space vacant. In the midst of an ongoing battle involving unhappy abutters, town officials have been accused of inefficiency and developers of overzealotry. Yet construction progresses against a dreary April backdrop. The structure is admittedly intimidating in its naked state, but the owners and architects behind the new Whalers' Wharf believe that completion will change all this. Once the building is finished, they assure, the grains of negativity will dissolve in the face of sheer splendor.

The original Whalers' Wharf building first housed the Provincetown Theater in 1919, and remained cherished throughout its various transformations. Dale Elmer bought the building in the early 1970s, creating affordable spaces for artisans to do their work and sell their goods. Praised for his unusually generous nature, Elmer provided the average starving artist means for survival amidst otherwise exorbitant real estate prices and sparse studio space offerings. This town heralds itself as the oldest American art colony. Indeed, yet in an economic environment that offers no sympathy or accommodation for those just starting out, how can the artistic tradition regenerate?

That notion is not lost on the new owners of the site, Paul deRuyter and Bruce McGregor. The two consulted extensively with Elmer before they purchased the property in May of 1999. "Dale Elmer has had a big impact in the community," deRuyter says. "He gave many artists their roots, gave them

the opportunity to start their own businesses in a time when expenses are prohibitive to most. He truly did a lot of great things and it is our hope to follow in those very same steps." deRuyter is unabashedly thrilled with the venture and is quick to praise the town and the project's promise. Despite the protests, many have seen evidence of beneficence. Whalers' Wharf could just ride the tide toward great profit (and it will have to recoup the millions of dollars spent on its rebirth), but the lofty ambition to offer low-rent havens for first-time, small business owners and artists is indeed honorable and, apparently, a priority.

With yellow plastic hardhats firmly in place, John Sunderland and Ginny Binder, project managers from Binder Boland & Associates, and I, took a late-March tour. Despite the harangue of clanging steel, piles of lumber underfoot, equipment to circumnavigate, and the general mayhem of construction, the new Whalers' Wharf was not hard to imagine. The building's backbone is a walkway that extends from the street clear out to the beach. Not far through the arched entrance, the sky appears unbroken—the walkway will remain roofless. Walking further, a central rotunda emerges, soon to be what Sunderland excitedly terms, "Provincetown's very own Globe Theatre." Within this space, he anticipates, street performers will entertain, theater groups will stage plays, writers and poets will read works in progress.

From the inside, the structure takes on an entirely new existence. Graceful and thoughtful in design, the building is welcoming, its three levels of open balconies revealing corridors of studio spaces and retail areas, with plenty of walls for displaying artwork. Sunderland, aware of detractors, explains, "People see this monolithic thing on the outside and they just don't understand the concept. ... This is not just a building, it's going to be an event, a destination with the intimacy of a European, medieval street. A true public space, Whalers' Wharf will retain its sense as a community center with increased public access. This is going to be a living place." Oblivious to the mess, Sunderland points to the rotunda, and describes his vision of long filaments of flowers spiraling down from above.

There have been plenty of challenges in the process of moving the building from blueprints to reality. The old Whalers' Wharf was a nightmare of building code and septic violations and the new building had to diverge considerably from the old in order to pass inspection. Time was a major factor (construction had to begin within a year of the fire if the builders wished to maintain the original building's size). Size is a major issue for the opposition, but Sunderland assures that "counting square footage, the new building is actually smaller than the old." But it doesn't *look* that way, and that, along with the allegation that town officials turned a blind

eye in favor of expediting the process, is what is causing trouble.

Ginny Binder fervently defends the project. "We wanted to prove that you could do an environmentally responsible and sensitive building without sacrificing good design," she says. Binder is adamant that the design is not only revolutionary, but efficient and creative, down to the least glamorous detail: "What we've done is to put the leaching fields right under the building itself. This has taken the septic system off the beach, helping to preserve nearby waters. In effect, it is built on its own waste."

The benefits to a struggling artistic community are impossible to ignore. The new Whalers' Wharf

will be home to two dozen artists' and artisans' studio spaces. Streetside on the third floor will be the Provincetown Tales Story Museum, which will focus on locally inspired legends and feature changing exhibits by local artists. Upstairs will be an indoor theater (hearkening back to the original building's first use), showing independent films off-season. And of course there will be more conventional (and profitable) businesses, at least twenty-five of them, along with



ARTIST'S SKETCH OF THE
ROTUNDA IN ACTION

a waterfront restaurant.

Perhaps the most outward sign of support and alliance with the artistic community is the owners' having commissioned renowned local artist Paul Bowen to create an installation for the façade of the building. Bowen responded with two enormous photographic collages, fourteen feet tall by five feet wide, that will hang in frames over the clapboard on each side of the doorway. The works may surprise admirers of Bowen's sculpture, but the subject matter is an extension of his current interests and recent works, and he credits the commission as "a perfect combination of circumstances." Images of historical whaling implements blend with images from today, including one of a beached minke whale's grim autopsy. Bowen says it is not his intent to glorify or condemn the whaling era. "I am more interested in the complexity of things rather than their moral implications."

By the time of this reading, Whalers' Wharf should be up and running to near full force, and the "complexity of things" so far in its advent will likely have subsided. Businesses should be established, artists ought to be happily at work within their snug studios, and perhaps even the merry chants of street performers will be resounding amidst crowds in the rotunda. As one can never predict the future, the story of the new Whalers' Wharf will be left to unfold on its own behalf.

Laura V. Scheel is a freelance writer and editor of A-Plus, a regional arts and antiques periodical. She lives in Wellfleet.

BLYTHE FRANK

Film Festivals and Filmmaking "On the Edge"

The first Provincetown International Film Festival exceeded everyone's expectations. Nearly thirty films were screened over a three-day period in June of 1999. Subjects ranged from gay and lesbian romance, to holistic veterinary medicine, to a Portuguese-language tale set on the island of Cape Verde. The Festival also showcased 16mm and digital video works such as *Pop*, Joel Meyerowitz's documentary of his father in the late stages of Alzheimer's, *Under Wraps*, a portrait of artists confronting menstruation, and *Love Remitted*, a collection of shorts from France that explores sexuality in the age of AIDS. Over 1,000 people attended the parties, premieres and screenings, and all 700 seats sold out for the "Evening with John Waters" at Town Hall. Waters, whose films have pushed boundaries for close to thirty years, received the first annual "Filmmaker On The Edge Award."

The Festival's resounding success followed years of talk, but it took funding and support to finally get the notion off the ground. Local business-owner and Festival founder PJ Layng recalls



"FILMMAKER ON THE EDGE," CHRISTINE VACHON

that Town Moderator Roslyn Garfield planted the idea in her brain almost four years ago, during a tennis game. The initial impetus, she says, was a need to drum up business early in the season. Layng joined forces with Marianne Lempke and Connie White of the Beacon Cinema Group of Boston, which hosts the annual International Festival of Women's Cinema at Cambridge's historic Brattle Theatre. Lempke says the Festival's scope grew out of the organizers' desire to mirror the spirit of Provincetown. "We wanted to reflect Provincetown's rich tradition of diversity and commitment to creativity, which for us means looking at films that challenge conventional ideas of what a film should be."

This year, in addition to dozens of screenings, the Festival will host a filmmaking symposium entitled "On the Edge 2000," on June 16th at Town Hall. The panel will include such producers, writers,

and directors as Christine Vachon, John Waters, Kimberly Pierce, and John Sayles. On the same date, the "Lily Award" will be presented to Lily Tomlin, honoring her courage and commitment to the art of entertainment. An evening with Tomlin, filled with cosmic conversation, candor, and her unforgettable characters, will follow.

This year's "Filmmaker on the Edge" recipient will be Christine Vachon, independent film producer and author of *Shooting to Kill: How an Independent Producer Blasts Through the Barriers to Make Movies That Matter*. Vachon studied film in the semiotics department at Brown University as an undergrad, but did not go to film school. "I know, lots of people learn the basics there," she writes in her book. "The problem is that everyone who comes out says, 'I want to be a director.' Somebody has to make the coffee." Vachon learned the business while working her way up from the thankless (and often unpaid) jobs of gofer and prop girl, to assistant editor, location scout, and script supervisor. Finally, in 1987, she and two friends founded Apparatus Productions to fund and produce experimental work. Her company has since expanded into what is now known as Killer Films, which produces low-budget, risky films such as *Boys Don't Cry*, the true story of a young woman who posed as a man, *Happiness*, a sympathetic portrayal of a pedophile, *Kids*, a disturbing portrayal of urban teenage life, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, the true story of radical feminist Valerie Solanas, who shot the famous artist, and *Safe*, about the demise of a suburban housewife who believes she is being environmentally poisoned. Vachon's films

explore dysfunctionality—in the home, family, community, and the minds of individuals. There are no easy answers to questions the scripts ask, nor "fixes" to issues the characters encounter. Instead, these films confront us head-on with the disturbing and unnerving aspects of humanity and modern life that most of us would prefer to ignore.

Vachon has found there are no limits to what her job might entail—from fine-tuning scripts to hiring actors, finding crews, making budgets, stroking egos, raising funds, working the film festival circuit, even bailing actors out of jail and inviting the entire cast and crew from a particular film to sleep in her living room. Vachon told me she chooses her projects according to three qualities: is the screenplay provocative and fresh; will the director be collaborative; and lastly, is it something that can be sold? She is realistic about commercial viability, and says in a recent *Los Angeles Times* interview, "I do get tired of those filmmakers who want \$8 million for their movies but don't care what the audience thinks. Those people should take up modern dance to express themselves." She also asserts that film can never be "art for art's sake" because it is a commercial artform that is expensive to make and to distribute.

Filmmaking takes money. Whether it's \$12,000 for a "low-low budget film," or one million for a mere "low-budget" film, without financial support,

A Fearful Epidemic

REBECCA MOTHERWELL SWANSON

Why is it that human beings have an urge to destroy the things they do not understand? The Bible condemns homosexuality, but doesn't it commend those who seek personal faith? What is gender? Is it something chemical, biological? Or, is it conditioned? Is sexual attraction intrinsic, or is it taught? And above all else, should society's urge to destroy force us to conceal our true identities behind others' fears?

The real-life tragedy of a young woman, Teena Brandon, who called herself Brandon Teena, and dressed, convincingly, as a man, harvests these questions. Murdered in 1993 by two of her homophobic "friends," Teena has been the subject of a 1998 documentary entitled *The Brandon Teena Story* and, in 1999, the dramatized film *Boys Don't Cry*, written by Kimberly Pierce and Andi Bienen, directed by Pierce, and produced by, among others, Christine Vachon.

As *Boys Don't Cry* opens, we watch Teena, played by Hilary Swank, flee her hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska, and settle in Falls City, a small town where nobody knows her past. In his review of *The Brandon Teena Story* in the *New York Times*, Stephen Holden described this secluded community as "The Land of The Pickup Truck," and adds, "Those who live and work here may have heard of gay liberation, but they've never met an uncloseted gay or transgendered person and have no desire to do so." It is here, in this apparent sanctuary, that Teena hopes to permanently play the role of Brandon.

At first, she succeeds. She becomes enamored with Lana, played by Chloe Sevigny, and the love is returned. Lana seems to know Teena's "secret," but for reasons unbeknownst to the viewer, holds back from admitting the full truth to herself. Teena has found a makeshift family with whom she feels comfortable. But when her sex is suddenly revealed, it is here, in this seeming oasis of hope, that Brandon discovers how swiftly things can change. The violence of her so-called friends' reactions encompasses the loathsome origins and results of homophobia in society today. If you choose to see *Boys Don't Cry*, chances are you will leave the movie theater pondering some serious questions about fear, homosexuality, and hatred. It was almost irritating that this film failed to provide answers. Nevertheless, if it had, the film would have been artificial. *Boys Don't Cry* is not a fairytale, but rather a realistic nightmare. Leaving the theater, you may feel as though you just awakened from a bad dream, but aren't dreams how human beings struggle with and resolve issues too painful for the day?

The 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay man beaten to death by homophobic roughnecks, reminded us once more how pervasive and insidious this prejudice remains. Spending most of my life in Greenwich, Connecticut, I was exposed to the racism and prejudices that often come along with gargantuan wealth. I will never forget that day in first grade when a fellow classmate asked me and my friends if we had ever seen two people of the same sex kiss. I was the only one who had. "Was it scary?" one girl asked. I didn't answer. I had never really sat down and asked myself how I felt about homosexuality. It was just something that I accepted.

I often wonder how I would have turned out had I not been exposed to Provincetown at such an early age. Perhaps that thought scares me much more than homosexuality. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to experience Provincetown, unique in its tolerance of both individuality and sexuality. I also feel thankful for people such as Christine Vachon, and the many makers of this film, who so creatively divulge the issues that many of us would rather ignore.

Rebecca Motherwell Swanson writes for her school paper at the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, and for the Provincetown Banner. She has summered in Provincetown all of her seventeen years.

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film remains in the treatment phase. To justify the expense, films must *make* money. John Waters said of the Provincetown Film Festival, "This is how Cannes started out. An off-season event. What better reason to visit town?" The Festival's primary goal is to sell tickets, with the additional economic incentive of filling guest houses, restaurants, and gift shops. The Festival is not competitive and does not judge its films. Its organizers intentionally gear toward attracting viewers, rather than rewarding filmmakers. Sometimes the external pressures of festivals can get a filmmaker down. Christine Vachon rants in an interview with *FEED* magazine, "I hate all film festivals pretty much across the board. Because they're a nightmare, because I'm usually there with an entourage of actors, the director, various family members, hangers-on, handlers and I spend the whole time organizing people from one place to another, making sure everyone has tickets to the events they want to be at. It's a gigantic cluster-fuck." In my interview with her, Vachon qualifies this statement, saying it followed one particularly stressful festival when she had both *Velvet Goldmine* and *Happiness* at Cannes. But for the most part, she recognizes that festivals build a base that could pluck a film out of obscurity and obtain the critical support necessary to launch a commercial success. Vachon also says she enjoys smaller festivals such as Provincetown's, where she can just sit back and watch movies all day long.

Watching films is one of the greatest common denominators in contemporary society. Festivals in particular have a unique aspect that home videos and even the local multiplex do not offer. There is something performative and communal about engaging in a film festival as a viewer. Provincetown, an independence loving town with a *genius loci* of diversity, tolerance, mobility, experimentation, and fearlessness, and comprised of artists, intellectuals, performers, writers, travelers, and soul-searchers, is an ideal community for a film festival.

It may also be ideal for the making of films. Though Provincetown is not historically a filmmaking town, a few films have been made here: Norman Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Wally White's *Lie Down with Dogs*, and Jonathan Morrill's *Johnny in Monsterland* and *The Bride of Johnny in Monsterland*. During the last century, avant-garde theater and painting thrived in Provincetown, but over several decades, their presence has diminished substantially. The fishing industry, which once fueled the local economy, has dwindled much further. As a result, the economy relies on the tourist dollar—and no longer just during the summer months. Perhaps filmmaking might fill the gap between commercialization and the desire (and ability) to maintain an artistic community. It's possible: witness Wilmington, North Carolina (where *Dawson's Creek* is shot), which has, in about fifteen years, emerged out of nowhere as the third largest filmmaking locale in the country. Filmmaking in Provincetown could revitalize the economy, give jobs to locals in the arts, and fuse the community as an independent entity that can mitigate its dependence on the tourist dollar.

Venues are essential, too. Though at present we have only The New Art Cinema, with two screens, and only open during high season, places to project 35mm, 16mm, and digital videos are popping up in places like the Mews, the Art Association, and Town Hall, and the new Whalers' Wharf will house a cinema, too.

Vachon writes in her book that an independent film "is a crisis waiting to happen." I learned that first-hand this March when Casey Clark and I shot our short digital film, *Off-Season*, in Provincetown. Some of the challenges we faced included losing (and replacing) our lead actor two days before the start of the shoot, having to switch from 16mm film to less expensive digital video in the week before the shoot due to an unreliable investor, and losing the keys to our fifteen-passenger van while shooting a scene in Beech Forest and getting stranded for three hours. Apart from the hourly ups and downs, we had incredible community support. Our locations—the Old Colony Tap, MacMillan Pier, Adam's Pharmacy, and a cottage on Tasha Hill—were all donated for free and without complaint. The Crown and Anchor and the Three Peaks provided housing for actors and crew; and the Lobster Pot, Napi's, Spiritus, Joe Coffee, and Georgie Porgie's donated meals and coffee. Friends and family played small roles, crewed on set, took still publicity photographs, lent cars, generators, clothes, and space heaters. When we had everything in the can after a week of 16-hour days of shooting, Casey and I were certain that without the generosity, energy, and limitless skills of the community, our film would not have gotten done.

After several loans and maxed-out credit cards, I can say that *Off-Season* falls safely into Hollywood producer Lawrence Gordon's definition of an independent film—"financed in such a way that it doesn't have any distribution deals attached, so you make it the way you want and then take it to market." Vachon writes that she no longer works this way, but remembers the exciting times of taking a movie to market and watching the bidding war. The distinction between big studio films and "low-budget" films is blurring, not only in terms of funding but content. Add to this the growing popularity of digital video, a medium with the potential to significantly impact the market, since lower-cost films can now be made by a growing portion of the population.

Provincetown, in all its glorious subversity, suffers the threat of becoming too insular a community. The power of film is that it has reach, allowing local messages to make their way into the greater national and global community, like notes in a bottle cast off from shore. The Film Festival, which came into being in order to augment the tourist season, may ultimately give Provincetown more visionary possibilities than its organizers could have ever imagined. Grab your popcorn, your Raisinets, and let's go to the movies.

Blythe Frank is a film student at Columbia University, an independent filmmaker, and a freelance writer. She divides her time between New York and Provincetown.



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